



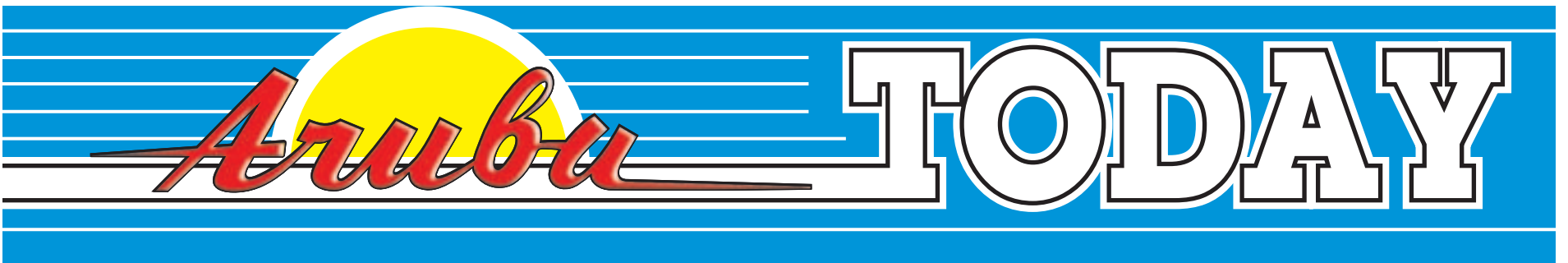
OBAMA SIGNS FOR BIPARTISAN BUDGET DEAL, DEFENSE BILL

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On Top Of The News Email: news@arubatoday.com website: www.arubatoday.com Tel: +297 582-7800 Friday, December 27, 2013



SILENT NIGHT

Utility crews work on power lines at dusk, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013, in Litchfield, Maine, where many have been without electricity since Monday's ice storm. Up to 7 inches of snow is forecast, worrying utilities that the additional weight on branches and transmission lines could cause setbacks in the around-the-clock efforts to restore power.

(AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

Snow Slows Efforts To Restore Maine Power

DAVID SHARP
Associated Press
GARDINER, Maine (AP) -- Snow fell Thursday in places still hustling to get power back on after a weekend ice storm that turned out the lights from Michigan to

Maine and into Canada. Eastern Maine and parts of the state's interior that have been without electricity since Sunday anticipated 3 to 7 inches of snow by the time the latest system pushed off the coast Thurs-

day night. Utilities worried that the additional weight on branches and transmission lines could cause setbacks in the around-the-clock efforts to restore power. "We don't think it's going to help us much,

that's for sure," said Susan Faloon, a spokeswoman for Bangor Hydro Electric in Maine. "There was some concern expressed over the last couple of days about that storm coming because obviously we still

have lot of stuff weighing down trees and lines. "The system is pretty compromised out there," she said. "We expect we will have more outages."

Continued on page 3

Pakistan:

American held by al-Qaida asks Obama to negotiate release

SALMAN MASOOD

© 2013 New York Times

ISLAMABAD - An American development consultant abducted by al-Qaida in Pakistan more than two years ago has urged President Barack Obama to help secure his freedom in an impassioned video message released by the group.

The consultant, Warren Weinstein, 72, was abducted from the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore in August 2011 when a group of armed men broke into his house.

Weinstein worked as the Pakistan director for J. E.

Austin Associates, an international development consulting company based in Arlington, Va.

The video by Al Sahab, the media wing of al-Qaida, was first reported by The Washington Post on Thursday.

In a 13-minute video message, Weinstein, bearded and wearing a light-colored jacket and a dark cap, appeared distraught and dejected when he spoke about his family, his ill health and his time in captivity.

"I am not in good health," he said, looking at the camera. "The years have

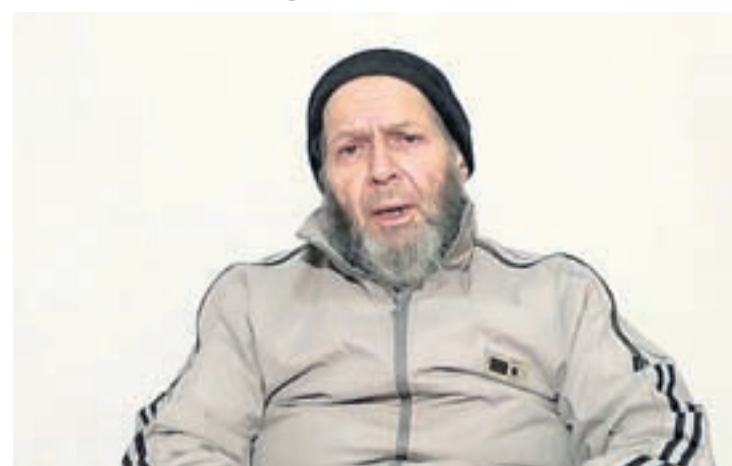
taken their toll."

Weinstein said he had served his country for 30 years and that nine years ago he came to Pakistan to help the U.S. government.

"I did so at a time when most Americans would not come here," he said. "And now, when I need my government, it seems that I have been totally abandoned and forgotten."

Weinstein said his captors had agreed to let him meet with his family if al-Qaida members held by the United States were released.

"Mr. Obama, you are a family man and so you un-



This image shows Warren Weinstein, a 72-year-old American development worker who was kidnapped in Pakistan by al-Qaida more than two years ago, appealing to President Obama to negotiate his release.

(AP Photo via AP video)

derstand the deep mental anxiety and anguish that I have been experiencing for these past more than two years," he said.

"I am therefore appealing to you on a humanitarian basis, if nothing else, and asking that you take the necessary actions to expedite my release and my return to my family and to my country, to our country."

He also asked Secretary of State John Kerry for help.

A handwritten letter, purportedly drafted by Weinstein, was also distributed along with the video message to local media outlets. It was dated Oct. 3, 2013.

This was the second video statement by Weinstein. An earlier video in which he made a similar plea was released by al-Qaida in 2012. Weinstein's kidnapping came at a time when relations between the United States and Pakistan were

deeply strained after a security contractor for the CIA shot and killed two Pakistanis in Lahore.

In an unrelated development Thursday, at least four people suspected of being militants were killed by a drone strike on a possible militant compound in northwestern Pakistan, a Pakistani official said.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the drone strike had taken place near Qutab Khel village, about three miles south of Miranshah, in the North Waziristan tribal region, a haven for Taliban and al-Qaida militants. The identity of those killed was not immediately known, but the Pakistani official said they may have been of Arab origin.

The Pakistani government condemned the drone strike. The use of drones by the CIA is deeply unpopular in Pakistan. □

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Mosquito virus spreads to Martinique

KINGSTON, Jamaica (AP)

— Health officials say a mosquito-borne virus appears to have spread to the French Caribbean island of Martinique.

French epidemiologists in Martinique have confirmed two local cases of the chikungunya virus. Local transmission of the illness typically found in Africa and Asia was first detected in the French Caribbean dependency of St. Martin.

Earlier this month, the World Health Organization reported 10 confirmed cases

in St. Martin, which shares a tiny island with Dutch St. Maarten. It's the first time the virus has been spread locally in the Western Hemisphere.

This week, Canada's public health agency recommended that travelers protect themselves from mosquito bites when traveling in St. Martin, St. Maarten and Martinique.

The viral illness can cause symptoms including fever and debilitating joint and muscle pain. There is no vaccine. □

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Snow slows efforts to restore Maine's power



Tom Henson sorts through frozen food that he's keeping frozen on a deck outside his home, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013, in Litchfield, Maine. The outside temperature was 19 degrees F. He's been keeping his home warm with a portable kerosene heater but without electricity he feared his refrigerated food would spoil. Many people in the town have been without power since Monday. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

Continued from Front

In Michigan, where about half a million homes and businesses lost power at the peak of the weekend storm, an inch or so of snow was expected. Utilities there reported 101,000 customers without power Thursday morning and said it could be Saturday before

all electricity is restored. Tony Carone lost power in his Lapeer, Mich., home Sunday morning. The 52-year-old lineman for Detroit-based DTE knew there were long hours ahead. "I was one of the casualties," he said while taking a break from restoration work Thursday morning. Maine reported more than 21,000 customers still out, down from a high of more

than 106,000. There were more than 101,000 without power in three Canadian provinces — Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick — including 54,000 in the city of Toronto. Day five without power was met by tired but mostly stoic Mainers. Bob and Katrina Johnson spent Christmas Eve at a family member's house that had no electricity.

Christmas morning was at their powerless house in Pittston and that afternoon meant a trip to Katrina's mother's house in Gardiner, which also had no electricity.

Nonetheless, they exchanged presents and celebrated.

By Thursday, the couple had grown weary from hauling a portable generator back and forth between their home and her mother's home to keep a freezer-load of moose meat from spoiling and run the heat long enough to keep pipes from freezing and bursting.

"You have to go with the flow and adapt, and do the best you can," Katrina Johnson said.

"You learn how to deal with it. Do you like it? No, but you deal with it."

In hard-hit Kennebec County, where the state capital of Augusta is located, glistening trees sagged under the weight of ice. Many tree limbs had snapped, littering yards.

On one road, workers in four bucket trucks from Massachusetts' N-Star utility company worked patiently to get a power line lifted back into place as snow fell sporadically. Paul Gra-

ham, the crew supervisor from Waltham, Mass., and a veteran of the devastating ice storm of 1998, said it could've been worse, even as his team worked its third consecutive 18-hour shift.

"Honestly, you got lucky," he said. "If it was a little more ice, poles would have been broken. Things would be on the ground. That's my take."

If there was another quarter of an inch or a half-inch of ice, people would've been out for a long, long, long time.

"But I'm sure no one is thinking they're lucky, right?"

A state ferry was commandeered to transport utility crews to restore power to the 600 or so residents on the island of Islesboro, where actor John Travolta has a home.

Most utility customers in Maine were expected to have their lights on by week's end, but there were some pockets where damage was so severe it could take until Wednesday.

Bangor Hydro Electric advised residents that it will be the end of the day Friday before its more than 11,000 customers are back online. The number has fluctuated as some get power back while others lose it. □

Obama signs bipartisan budget deal, defense bill

JOSH LEDERMAN

Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — President Barack Obama signed a bipartisan budget deal Thursday easing spending cuts and a defense bill cracking down on sexual assault in the military, marking a modest end to a challenging year for the White House and Congress.

Obama put his signature on both hard-fought bills while vacationing in Hawaii, where the president has been laying low since Saturday as he regroups for the midterm election year ahead. The bill signing marks one of Obama's last official acts in a year beset by a partial government shutdown, a near-default by the Treasury, a calamitous health care rollout and near-perpetual congressional gridlock.

Although the budget deal falls short of the grand bargain that Obama and



President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama arrive to speak to members of the military and their families in Anderson Hall at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2013, in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. The first family is in Hawaii for a family holiday vacation.

(AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

congressional Republicans once aspired to, it ends the cycle of fiscal brinkmanship — for now — by preventing another shutdown for near-

ly two more years.

But the rare moment of comity may be short-lived. Hanging over the start of the year is a renewed fight

over raising the nation's borrowing limit, which the Treasury says must be resolved by late February or early March to avert an un-

precedented U.S. default. Both sides are positioning behind customary hard-line positions, with Republicans insisting they want concessions before raising the debt limit and Obama insisting he won't negotiate.

The last vestiges of 2013's legislative wrangling behind him, Obama's attention turns now to major challenges and potential bright spots in the year ahead. In late January, Obama will give his fifth State of the Union address, setting his agenda for the final stretch before the 2014 midterm elections render him less able to focus Washington's attention on his own priorities.

Obama signed the two bills and several others in private, without reporters present, after an early-morning trip to the gym at the Marine Corps base near his vacation rental in Oahu. □

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Conviction overturned for church official accused of covering up abuse

STEVEN YACCINO
© 2013 New York Times

A Pennsylvania appeals court on Thursday overturned the child-endangerment conviction of a Roman Catholic official, upending a landmark court case that had found a senior church member guilty of covering up sexual abuses by priests under his supervision.

The unanimous decision by the Superior Court in Pennsylvania dismissed the criminal case against the church official, Msgr. William J. Lynn, who had been sentenced to three to six years.

In the ruling, state Superior Court judges said there was not sufficient evidence to prove that Lynn had intended to "promote or facilitate" acts of child endangerment, and they ordered his release from prison.

The Philadelphia district attorney, R. Seth Williams, said Thursday that he strongly disagreed with the decision. "While we are deciding what our next course of action will be, we most likely will be appealing this decision," Williams said.

Lynn was convicted in June 2012 after prosecutors charged that he had reassigned priests who preyed on children to new



In this 2012 photo, Monsignor William Lynn leaves the Criminal Justice Center in Philadelphia. Lynn, a Roman Catholic church official, who has been jailed for more than a year for his handling of priest sex-abuse complaints, had his conviction reversed and was ordered released Thursday Dec. 26, 2013. In dismissing the landmark criminal case, a three-judge Superior Court panel unanimously rejected prosecutors' arguments that Monsignor Lynn, the first U.S. church official ever charged or convicted for the handling of clergy-abuse complaints, supervised the welfare of any particular child.

(AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

parishes in Philadelphia when he was secretary for clergy. The conviction stemmed from a case against a priest, Edward V. Avery, who was transferred to a parish in northeastern Philadelphia despite a complaint of sexual abuse. During the trial, prosecutors presented evidence that Lynn had concealed information from the public to avoid bad publicity and lawsuits. Lynn's lawyer argued that the state's child-endangerment law at the time applied only to parents and caregivers, not to supervisors like Lynn.

"I felt all along that the trial was a freight train," said Jeffery Lindy, Lynn's lawyer during the trial. "None of the judges who had

this case wanted to stand in the way. It was too bad politically." The single guilty verdict in the trial was widely seen as a victory for the Philadelphia district attorney's office, which had been investigating the archdiocese since 2002. It was hailed by advocates for abuse victims who have argued for years that senior church officials should be held accountable for concealing evidence and failing to act against predatory priests. Lynn was acquitted of conspiracy and a second count of endangerment. The three-month trial cast a harsh light on the leadership of the archdiocese, especially Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua, whom Lynn advised. □

Suspect in LA airport shooting pleads not guilty

LINDA DEUTSCH
AP Special Correspondent
RA NCHO CUCAMONGA,
California (AP) — A short,

slender man speaking in a hoarse voice pleaded not guilty Thursday to 11 federal charges, including the murder of a Transportation Security Administration screener and the wounding of three other people during a rampage at Los Angeles International Airport last month.

The charges could bring

him the death penalty. The decision on whether the government will seek the ultimate penalty will take a long time and will ultimately rest with U.S. Attorney General Erik Holder.

Paul Anthony Ciancia, 23, who was wounded before his arrest, occasionally touched a large, white bandage on his neck during a three-minute arraignment before a federal magistrate at the West Valley Detention Center east

of Los Angeles. The center has a medical facility.

The diminutive defendant acknowledged his name in a near-whisper and that he had read his 11-count indictment.

Trial was set for Feb. 11 in a downtown Los Angeles federal court. But that was a formality required to meet federal speedy trial requirements. Ciancia can agree to a delay later if his lawyers determine more time is needed for prepara-

tion. A pretrial hearing was set for Jan. 27.

U.S. Attorney's spokesman Thom Mrozek said prosecutors are continuing to investigate the event which wreaked havoc at one of the nation's largest airports and disrupted air travel nationwide.

Authorities say the unemployed motorcycle mechanic arrived at the airport's Terminal 3 on Nov. 1 with the intention of killing TSA workers. □



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Online shopping grows, with some growing pains

MAE ANDERSON
SCOTT MAYEROWITZ
AP Business Writers

Americans waited until the last minute to buy holiday gifts, but retailers weren't prepared for the spike. Heavy spending in the final days of the mostly lackluster season sent sales up 3.5 percent between Nov. 1 and Tuesday, according to MasterCard Advisors SpendingPulse, which tracks payments but doesn't give dollar figures. Online shopping led the uptick, with spending up 10 percent to \$38.91 billion between Nov. 2 and Sunday, research firm comScore said.

"We always have last-minute Charlies, but this year even people who normally complete shopping earlier completed shopping later," said Marshal Cohen, chief retail analyst at market research firm NPD Group.

But the late surge caught companies off guard. UPS and FedEx failed to deliver some packages by Christmas due to a combination of poor weather and overloaded systems, leaving some unhappy holiday shoppers.

Justin Londagin and his wife ordered their 7-year-old son a jersey of Russell Wilson of the Seattle Seahawks from NFL's web site on Dec. 19. They paid \$12.95 extra for two-day shipping to get it to their Augusta, Kansas, home before Christmas, but it didn't arrive in time.

"We had to get creative

and wrote him a note from Santa to tell him that the jersey fell out of the sleigh and Santa will get it to him as soon as he could," he said.

Amazon is offering customers with delayed shipments a refund on their shipping charges and \$20 toward a future purchase. And other retailers such as Macy's

said they are still looking into the situation.

The last-minute surge this year solidifies the increasing popularity of online shopping, which accounts for about 10 percent of sales during the last three months of the year. But it also underscores the challenges that companies face delivering on the ex-

perience, particularly during the holiday shopping season that runs from the beginning of November through December.

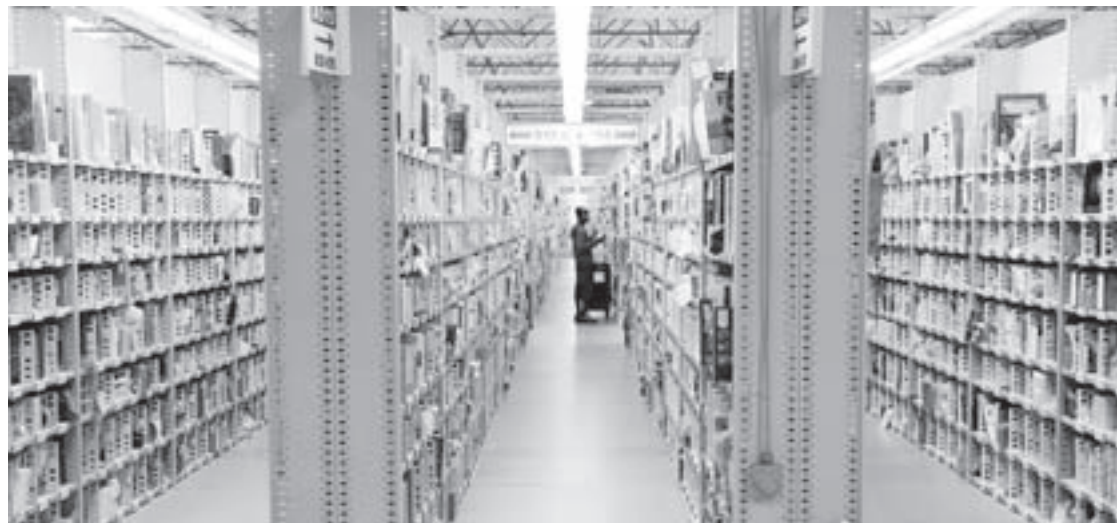
Analysts say FedEx and UPS typically work closely with big retailers, trying to get a sense of what the volume of packages will be during peak times like the holiday season. Extra flights, trucks

and seasonal workers can be added if the projections are large.

But this year, David Vernon, a senior research analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein, said weather played a role. The early December ice storms in Dallas could have hurt operations, he said, and packages can start to accumulate. And that got compounded this year by a late surge in shipments, he said.

"Clearly, as a group, (they) underestimated the demand for Internet retailing during the holidays," Vernon said.

Another problem was the growing popularity of retailers offering free shipping. Amazon, for one, has a two-day free shipping offer that comes with its \$79 annual Prime membership. The company said, just in the third week of December, more than 1 million people signed up for the membership. □



An Amazon.com employee stocks a shelf at an Amazon.com Fulfillment Center. Shoppers waited until the last possible minute to buy presents this year, even online. The late surge sent holiday retail sales up 3.5 percent, which ultimately was good news for retailers but caught shippers UPS and FedEx unprepared.
(AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Suit:

IPO bad for Empire State Building investors

JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Thou-

sands of stakeholders in the Empire State Building lost more than \$400 million in potential profits when the managing owners rebuffed potential buyers in order to sell public shares in the iconic skyscraper, a new lawsuit says.

By spurning all-cash offers for the tower and instead packaging it with lesser-known office prop-

erties into a publicly traded stock, father-and-son real estate magnates Peter and Anthony Malkin put their interests ahead of those of the building's longtime investors, lawyer John Rizio-Hamilton said Thursday. He represents one of those investors, who filed the suit Tuesday seeking class-action status on behalf of roughly 3,000 people who hold Empire State Building shares that were sold privately in 1961.

The Malkins' company, Empire State Realty Trust, said through a spokeswoman that the suit's claims were "wholly without merit, and we will respond to them in court."

The suit, first reported Thursday by the Daily News, marks the latest legal challenge over the October public offering that ushered the tower immortalized in "King Kong" and "Sleepless in Seattle" into the New York Stock Ex-

change.

Completed in 1931, the 102-story skyscraper was the world's tallest building until the World Trade Center supplanted it in 1972. When the Empire State Building changed hands in 1961, the buyers sold shares at \$10,000 each to help finance the deal. Some investors were everyday New Yorkers who pulled together just enough cash to get partial shares. □

US Financial Front:

Weekly American jobless claims drop 42K to 338K

PAUL WISEMAN

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits dropped by 42,000 last week to a seasonally adjusted 338,000, the biggest drop since November 2012. But economists say the figures from late November and December are warped by seasonal volatility around the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's holidays. The Labor Department reported Thursday that the less-volatile four-week average rose 4,250 to 348,000. Claims had jumped 75,000 over the two weeks that ended Dec. 14 before plunging last week. The La-



Jona Caldwell joins a long line of job seekers outside the Ferguson Community Center in Cordova, Tenn. The Labor Department reported a dip in the number of Americans who applied for unemployment benefits in the last week on Dec. 26, 2013. (AP Photo/Jim Weber)

bor Department struggles to account for seasonal hiring by retailers and other businesses and for temporary layoffs of cafeteria workers and other employ-

ees at schools that close for the holidays.

Unemployment claims are a proxy for layoffs and the recent declines are consistent with a solid job market. The economy has shown signs of improvement recently, so much so that the Federal Reserve announced Dec. 18 that it would reduce its stimulus spending on bonds by \$10 billion — to \$75 billion a month. The economy expanded at a 4.1 percent annual pace from July through September, the fastest rate since late 2011 and much greater than previously thought.

Hiring has been healthy the past four months. The economy added an av-

erage of 204,000 jobs every month from August through November, an improvement from earlier this year.

The unemployment rate fell in November to a five-year low of 7 percent. Still, that remains above the 5 percent to 6 percent rate that would signal a normal job market. And long-term unemployment remains a big blot on the economy's performance: Nearly 4.1 million Americans have been unemployed for six months or more.

Before 2008, the number of long-term unemployed had never surpassed 3 million people, according to records dating back to 1948. □

Cracker Barrel:

Top investor considers bid for company

RACHEL ABRAMS

© 2013 New York Times

Cracker Barrel's largest shareholder urged its board this week to consider selling the company - to him.

In a letter to the board, Sardar Biglari, an activist investor who owns nearly 20 percent of Cracker Barrel Old Country Store Inc. through his investment firm, the Biglari Capital Corp., said it would take an "entrepreneurial mind" to improve the company's earnings, which he called "far too low in your hands."

Biglari urged the company to consider "all potential extraordinary transactions" to improve shareholder value, including selling the restaurant chain to the highest bidder. If the board did not "promptly" announce a sale process, Biglari said in a separate Securities and Exchange Commission filing, he would call a special shareholders' meeting to vote on such a deal.

But Biglari, whose previous attempts to gain a seat on Cracker Barrel's board have failed, doesn't just want the board to sell him the company, which is based in Tennessee. He also wants it to help him

amend Tennessee law, which he says restricts such a deal.

Representatives for Cracker Barrel and the Biglari Capital Corp. could not be reached for comment.

Biglari also suggested that the board begin a share repurchase program, but said he would consider selling his stake in the com-

pany if it did so since he would "not want to leave our money in your care."

Cracker Barrel temporarily withdrew products relating to A&E's "Duck Dynasty" reality series after one of the show's stars made inflammatory comments about gay people, a move Biglari pointed to as evidence of poor management. □

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Egypt:

Government conflict with Muslim Brotherhood swells

MAGGIE MICHAEL

Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's security authorities launched a sweep of arrests of Muslim Brotherhood members on Thursday and warned that holding a leadership post in the group could now be grounds for the death penalty after it was officially declared a terrorist organization, stepping up the government's confrontation with its top political nemesis.

The announcement came as a bomb exploded in a busy intersection in Cairo Thursday morning, hitting a bus and wounding five people. Though small, the blast raised fears that a campaign of violence by Islamic militants that for months has targeted police and the military could turn to civilians in retaliation for the stepped up crackdown.

The terrorist labeling of the Brotherhood — an unprecedented step even during past decades when the

group was banned — takes to a new level the government's moves to crush the group, which rode on elections to dominate Egypt's politics the past three years until the military removed Islamist President Mohamed Morsi in July after massive protests against him.

The Brotherhood vowed to "qualitatively" escalate its protests against the new military-backed interim government, whose authority it rejects. The group has struggled to bring numbers into the streets in past months under a crackdown that has already killed hundreds of its members and put thousands more in prison, including Morsi and other top leaders — and there was little sign of any protests on Thursday.

The moves — all playing out before the backdrop of increasing violence by al-Qaida-inspired militants — raise the potential for greater turmoil as the country nears a key

Jan. 14-15 referendum on a revised constitution, a milestone in the post-Morsi political transition. The government is pushing for overwhelming passage of

for the Strong Egypt Party founded by ex-Brotherhood member Abdel-Moneim Abolfotoh, warned that the terrorism label "leaves the Muslim Broth-

"stand steadfast in confronting terrorism."

"Don't let any of the incidents happening now affect the will of Egyptians. Never," he said. "Anyone



Egyptian policemen stand guard after an explosion hit a public bus, background, in Cairo's eastern Nasr City district, Egypt, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013. Egypt's security authorities launched a sweep of arrests of Muslim Brotherhood members on Thursday and warned that holding a leadership post in the group could now be grounds for the death penalty after it was officially declared a terrorist organization, stepping up the government's confrontation with its top political nemesis.

(AP Photo/Mohammed Abu Zaid)

the new document, while the Brotherhood vows to stop it with protests.

Ahmed Imam, spokesman

erhood and its supporters only one choice, which is violence."

Both sides are showing "a great deal of stupidity," he said, blaming the Brotherhood for failing to firmly distance itself from militant violence and the government for closing doors to reconciliation.

Speaking to military graduates Thursday, military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, the man who removed Morsi and is now Egypt's most powerful figure, vowed the country will

harms you will be wiped from the face of Earth."

In past months, authorities have used penal code's various legal justifications for arresting Morsi supporters, from inciting violence to blocking roads. But Wednesday's terror designation means the Brotherhood's hundreds of thousands of members can be arrested for simple membership under a tough, years-old anti-terrorism law that outlines death penalties or long prison sentences for some crimes. □



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Japanese premier visits contentious war shrine

HIROKO TABUCHI

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TOKYO - Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan visited a contentious Tokyo war shrine early Thursday, provoking swift condemnation from China and South Korea, both victims of Japan's wartime aggression. Wearing formal attire, Abe led a group of government officials into the Yasukuni Shrine to pay his respects. Abe's visit to the shrine,

2006.

Past visits by Japanese politicians have angered China and South Korea, both of which suffered greatly under Japan's empire-building efforts in the early 20th century.

Japanese prime ministers had stayed away from the shrine in recent years as the country sought to improve relations with China and South Korea.

Abe did not visit the shrine

his brief visit, Abe expressed frustration that the shrine still provoked such controversy. He said that he had paid his respects not just to those who gave their lives serving Japan but to fallen soldiers around the world. He added that he had prayed for peace.

His visit came at a tense time. Japan is already in a standoff with China over control of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea

Luo Zhaohui, director of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Asian affairs department, wrote on the microblogging site Weibo: "This is absolutely unacceptable to the Chinese

people. It will cause great harm to the feelings of the Asian peoples and create a new, major political obstacle on bilateral relationships. Japan must bear the consequences." □



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, second from right, follows a Shinto priest to pay respect for the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013. Abe visited Yasukuni war shrine in a move sure to infuriate China and South Korea. The visit to the shrine, which honors 2.5 million war dead including convicted class A war criminals, appears to be a departure from Abe's "pragmatic" approach to foreign policy, in which he tried to avoid alienating neighboring countries. It was the first visit by a sitting prime minister since Junichiro Koizumi went to mark the end of World War II in 2006.

(AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

which honors Japan's war dead, including Class A war criminals from the World War II era, was the first by a sitting Japanese head of state since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid his respects there in

during his first stint as prime minister from 2006 to 2007, but he was a regular visitor as a lawmaker of the Liberal Democratic Party and most recently as opposition leader last year.

Speaking to reporters after

and over a new air defense identification zone announced by China that includes airspace over the disputed islands. It is also embroiled in a dispute with South Korea over separate islets.

Thailand urges delay in polls amid violence

THOMAS FULLER

© 2013 New York Times

BANGKOK - After chaotic clashes between the police and anti-government protesters in Bangkok on Thursday that left one police officer dead and dozens of people injured on both sides, the Election Commission of Thailand urged the postponement of national elections set for Feb. 2, further clouding the way forward for Thailand after a month of debilitating street protests.

A postponement would be a victory for the protesters, who oppose the elections on the grounds that they will probably return to power the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, whose party is very popular in the northern half of the country but despised by many southerners and members of the Thai elite.

Charupong Ruangsuwan, the head of the governing party, who is also interior minister in the outgoing government, reacted an-

grily to the proposed postponement.

"I insist that the Election Commission has to comply with the law," he said in televised remarks.

"The Election Commission has a duty to carry out the whole process." Over the past month, protesters have raided government ministries, cut power to government offices and police stations, and marched through Bangkok in huge numbers. □

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Russia: Arafat's death not caused by radiation

V. ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian probe into the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has found that his death wasn't caused by radiation — a finding that comes after a French probe found traces of the radioactive isotope polonium and a Swiss investigation said the timeframe of his illness and death was consistent with that of polonium poisoning. Vladimir Uiba, the head of the Federal Medical and Biological Agency, said Thursday that Arafat died of natural causes and the agency had no plans to conduct further tests. Teams of scientists from France, Switzerland and Russia were asked to determine whether polonium, a rare and extremely lethal substance, played a role in Arafat's death in a French military hospital in 2004. French experts found traces of polonium but said it was "of natural environmental origin," according to Arafat's widow, Suha Arafat. Swiss scientists, meanwhile,

said they found elevated traces of polonium-210 and lead, and that the timeframe of Arafat's illness and death was consistent with poisoning from ingesting polonium.



In this October, 2004 file photo, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat pauses during a session at his compound in the West Bank town of Ramallah. A Russian probe into the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has found no trace of radioactive poisoning, the chief of the government agency that conducted the study said Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013.

(AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

"It was a natural death; there was no impact of radiation," Uiba said, according to Russian news agencies. In October, he was quoted by the Interfax news agency as say-

ing that Arafat "could not have been poisoned by polonium" and that "traces of such a substance were not found." There was no immediate explanation as to how the three investiga-

tions could have come up with different conclusions. Palestinians have long suspected Israel of poisoning Arafat, which Israel denies. Russia, meanwhile, has had strong ties with Palestin-

ian authorities since Soviet times when Moscow supported their struggle.

Dr. Abdullah Bashir, the head of the Palestinian medical committee investigating Arafat's death, said they were studying the Russian and Swiss reports.

"When we finish we are going to announce the results," Bashir said in a telephone interview from Amman, Jordan. He wouldn't say when that might be.

Arafat's widow filed a legal complaint in France seeking an investigation into whether he was murdered after a 2012 report which said traces of polonium were found on his clothes. As part of that probe, French investigators had Arafat's remains exhumed and ordered a series of tests on them.

Polonium occurs naturally in very low concentrations in the Earth's crust and also is produced artificially in nuclear reactors. There are also tiny, generally undetectable amounts of polonium in humans.

Palestinian Ambassador to Russia, Fayed Mustafa, was quoted by state RIA Novos-

ti news agency Thursday as saying that the Palestinian authorities respect the Russian experts' conclusions but consider it necessary to continue research into Arafat's death. Uiba said, however, that his agency hasn't received any Palestinian request for additional studies. Arafat died Nov. 11, 2004, a month after falling ill at his West Bank headquarters. At the time, French doctors said he died of a stroke and had a blood-clotting problem, but records were inconclusive about what caused that condition. Polonium can be a byproduct of the chemical processing of uranium, but usually it's made artificially in a nuclear reactor or a particle accelerator. Dozens of countries including Russia, Israel and the U.S. have the nuclear capability to produce polonium.

One of the most famous and recent cases of polonium-210 poisoning was that of ex-KGB officer Alexander Litvinenko who died in London in 2006 after drinking tea laced with the radioactive isotope. □

Argentina:

Carnivorous fish attack injures 70

The Associated Press
BUENOS AIRES, Argentina

(AP) — An attack by a school of carnivorous fish has injured 70 people bathing in an Argentine river, including seven children who lost parts of their fingers or toes.

Director of lifeguards Federico Cornier said Thursday that thousands of bathers were cooling off from 100-degree temperatures in the Parana River in Rosario on Wednesday when bathers suddenly began


complaining of bite marks on their hands and feet. He blamed the attack on palometas, "a type of piranha, big, voracious and with sharp teeth that can really bite."


Paramedic Alberto Manino said some children he treated lost entire digits. He told the Todo Noticias channel that city beaches were closed, but it was so hot that within a half-hour, many people went back to the water. □

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Turkish PM struggles to contain corruption probe

SUZAN FRASER
Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — After a decade of dominance over Turkey's political scene, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan appears to have been thrown off balance by a rapidly expanding corruption scandal that has brought down members of his cabinet and strained ties to the U.S. Forced to fire three of his ministers — one of whom immediately implicated the prime minister in the scandal — and struggling to contain the scope of the investigation, Erdogan seems unlikely to come out of the crisis unscathed. But many observers say it's too early to write off the savvy politician who has weathered a series of crises since his Islamic-based party came to power in 2002. "If the allegations are true, this would without doubt be the deepest crisis the government has faced," said Murat Yetkin, editor in chief and political commentator for the Hurriyet Daily News newspaper. In comments published Thursday, Erdogan said he believes he is the ultimate

target of the probe but declared that those trying to enmesh him in the scandal will be left "empty-handed." Erdogan, 59, was long hailed as a transformational leader who came to power on a promise to crack down on corruption and carried out spectacular economic and political reforms. He turned Turkey into a relatively stable and prosperous country, curtailing the powers of the military and raising the nation's international profile. More recently, though, critics say he has cut a more authoritarian and erratic figure, often reverting to conspiracy theories to deal with crises. Those tactics have damaged his image as an international statesman. He has blamed the scandal on a rival Islamic movement led by Fethullah Gulen — a cleric who is living in self-imposed exile in the U.S. and whose followers are widely believed to have a strong foothold in Turkey's police and judiciary. Gulen has denied any involvement. Erdogan has also suggested the United States is behind the investigation, prompting American officials to

warn the government not to endanger ties between the close NATO allies with unfounded allegations. The scandal erupted on Dec. 17, when police launched a probe targeted at Erdogan's allies, focusing on alleged illicit money transfers to Iran and bribery for construction projects. Dozens were detained in police raids, including the sons of three key government ministers. Two of the sons were later arrested on bribery charges. Erdogan resisted calls for the dismissal of the three ministers for a week but finally gave in on Wednesday, forcing them to step down and then distancing himself from them. The move backfired when one of them, Environment and Urban Planning Minister



Turkish President Abdullah Gul, center, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, 7th left, during a meeting of the National Security Council in Ankara, Turkey, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013. After a decade of dominance over Turkey's political scene, a rapidly developing corruption and bribery scandal has for the first time left Erdogan looking off balance and not in control of the political reins. (AP Photo/Mehmet Demirci)

Erdogan Bayraktar, refused to go quietly and mounted an unprecedented attack on Erdogan, calling on him to step down too. Bayraktar said construction projects under investigation were

launched at the prime minister's instructions. The crisis has upset the markets, and the Turkish lira plummeted to a record low on Thursday against the dollar. □

Search effort scaled back in Turks and Caicos capsizing

PROVIDENCIALES, Turks and Caicos Islands (AP) — Authorities in the Turks and Caicos Islands have scaled back the search for more casualties or survivors from the deadly Christmas Day capsizing of an overloaded migrant boat. A government spokesman says the Marine Branch of the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force is still searching just off Providenciales. Neil Smith says fewer units are taking part and U.S. Coast Guard

aircraft are no longer actively involved in the effort. The water is shallow and clear and authorities do not expect to find more bodies. Investigators were interviewing survivors Thursday at an immigration detention center in Providenciales to find out more about the smuggling voyage and the accident. At least 17 migrants from Haiti died when the vessel overturned as it was being towed to shore by police. □

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Philippine rebels vow to build 25,000-strong force

DAVAO, Philippines (AP) — Philippine communist rebels vowed Thursday to intensify attacks against government troops and build a 25,000-strong guerrilla force, but the military mocked the target as unrealistic. New People's Army guerrillas marked the 45th founding anniversary of their underground party with a clandestine gathering at a mountain lair, where they invited journalists in south-eastern Agusan del Sur province. A communist rebel statement urged the Maoist guerrillas to "wipe out enemy units and seize their weapons" and "increase the number of our Red fighters to 25,000." Military spokesman Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala, however, said the rebels, whose armed guerrilla strength has dwindled to 4,000, have been on a decline and would not

achieve such a target due to problems such as the loss of community support and infighting. "They're dreaming," Zagala said. "The reality is they have been on a decline due to the loss of their mass bases, surrenders and other problems." The communist rebellion in the Philippines began in the late 1960s with a ragtag group armed with a few rifles. The movement peaked during the repressive years under dictator Ferdinand Marcos with several thousand full-time guerrillas. Though it remains one of the world's longest-running Marxist insurgencies, the rebel movement has grown considerably weaker in recent years due to battle setbacks, surrenders and factionalism. They remain a national security concern. Talks to end the rebellion



Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, left, inspects the newly-acquired Augusta Westland AW 109 Power helicopter during a ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Armed Forces of the Philippines at Camp Aguinaldo at suburban Quezon city northeast of Manila, Philippines. Philippine communist rebels vowed Thursday to intensify attacks against government troops and build a 25,000-strong guerrilla force. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

have stalled since 2011 due to disagreements between the government and guerrillas over the release of several jailed rebel leaders. □

8 dead after heavy rains on St. Vincent

DUGGIE JOSEPH Associated Press KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent (AP) — Flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains have killed at least eight people and injured five on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent, officials said. The government's National Emergency Management Organization said one of those who died was an 18-year-old college student. Five people were reported missing. Among the eight killed was a cousin of Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, Cassian Gonsalves, who died Tuesday night when a landslide crashed through his house, Cassian cousin Mark Boyea told The Associated Press. The devastation prompted the prime minister to cut short a family vacation that had taken him to England and Rome, and he was due to return home Thurs-

day. Photos posted by the Vatican showed that Gonsalves had met with Pope Francis. In the heavily hit area of North Leeward in north-western St. Vincent, a family of five was killed when a house was swept into their home. Sixty-two people had taken refuge at a school converted to a shelter. The emergency office said nine houses had been destroyed and 15 others were damaged. Several communities remained isolated because of damaged bridges or blocked roads, it said. There was extensive flooding and damage elsewhere in the eastern part of the Caribbean. Police on the nearby island of St. Lucia said a man died there when a wall fell on him. Traditional Christmas Eve midnight religious services were cancelled and several churches in the capi-

tal of Castries opened their doors to stranded people. "It's the worst Christmas I will ever spend," said Jude Francis, his clothes soaked from the rain. St. Lucia Prime Minister Kenny Anthony described the damage as an emergency and a major setback for the country. "I don't think I can recall when we have had such heavy rainfall on the eve of Christmas," he said. On the nearby island of Dominica, dozens of homes and at least two hotels were evacuated because of the danger of landslides and several roads were blocked by mud. □ The cluster of thunderstorms came as the small islands were crowded with holiday tourists. Showers were expected to linger over the British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic throughout Wednesday. □

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during the entire year. Thank you to Gaita Las Unicas and to Le Groove for their wonderful performance and to everyone who made this event possible and successful!

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Packers' Rodgers back, to start Bears game

GREEN BAY, Wisconsin (AP) — Aaron Rodgers has been cleared to return from a left collarbone injury, just in time to start for the Green Bay Packers against the Chicago Bears in a game to decide the NFC North title.

With no advance warning and little fanfare, the franchise quarterback received the long-awaited good news at the same time as the rest of his teammates on Thursday.

"This is a fun day for me, but I think the focus needs to be on this game and the opportunity we have to win the division," Rodgers said. Soon enough. But the spotlight for now is squarely on the return of one of the NFL's most irreplaceable players. Green Bay has won two out of eight games since Rodgers went down during a 27-20 loss on Nov. 4



Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers plays with the ball before an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2013, in Arlington, Texas. **Associated Press**

to Chicago. The Packers have managed to hang on, with a shot to win a third straight division title with a victory on Sunday at Soldier Field. Win and Green Bay returns to Lambeau Field

the following week-end to host a wild-card team in the first round of the playoffs.

"We're in it. You know we have a chance against our rivals, and what a better way than

to go down there and get some redemption and host a home playoff game," Rodgers said. The last two months have been filled with angst for Packers fans. Discussions about

whether Rodgers should risk future injury or return to bolster Green Bay's playoff chances have filled sports talk radio shows and holiday office parties.

Now imagine what it was like for the Packers' brass and team doctor. The organization made a big investment in Rodgers this past offseason, signing him to a five-year contract extension through the 2019 season worth as much as \$110 million. "Every football player that plays in this game Sunday will have risk. I think we all understand that," coach Mike McCarthy said. "So we've done our due diligence. We've gone through all the evaluations and we feel it is time. Aaron is ready to play." □

Manning : TD record is temporary
See Page 21



The Oregon State football team celebrates after beating Boise State in the Hawaii Bowl NCAA college football game, in Honolulu, Tuesday, Dec. 24, 2013. Oregon State won 38-23.

Associated Press

OSKAR GARCIA
Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Oregon State's Rashaad Reynolds returned two fumbles for touchdowns, helping the Beavers beat Boise State 38-23 in the Hawaii Bowl on Tuesday.

Oregon State won six of its first seven games of the season but then came a five-game slide that was halted in Honolulu.

"They haven't lost their focus even though there's been some discouragement, they didn't let it stay

with them," Oregon State coach Mike Riley said. "I loved how they've responded all year."

Brandin Cooks took eight receptions for 60 yards and a touchdown. He extended his Pac-12 single-season record to 128 receptions and broke the conference record for yards receiving with 1,730, passing Southern California's Marqise Lee. Quarterback Sean Mannion threw for 259 yards and a touchdown, giving him a Pac-12-record 4,662 yards passing for the season. Oregon State kept Boise State (8-5) out of the end

zone until the third quarter, well after the Beavers had opened a big lead. Reynolds had his first fumble recovery about 12 minutes into the game when Scott Crichton stripped Boise State quarterback Grant Hedricks in the end zone. The ball popped forward to the 3-yard line, where Reynolds picked it up and ran it in.

Reynolds tacked on another fumble return in the second quarter on his way to game MVP honors. Troy Ware caught a 6-yard pass near the sideline for Boise State, but Larry Scott punched the ball out as

Ware was falling to the ground. Reynolds picked it up and ran 70 yards to the end zone. "You just can't overcome those — it's very difficult to overcome those versus a Pac-12 team," Boise State interim coach Bob Gregory said. "That's tough when we're not on the field on defense, but we didn't make enough plays on defense either."

Matt Miller led Boise State with 11 catches for 206 yards and a touchdown, with most of the production coming after the game was decided. Miller set a school record with 88 catches this season. □

College Roundup

Oregon St. tops Boise St. 38-23 in Hawaii Bowl

LeBron James wins AP Male Athlete of the Year

TIM REYNOLDS

AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The only thing that keeps LeBron James up worrying at night is basketball, which simultaneously makes perfect sense and no sense.

On one hand, he's the game's best player.

On the other, he's rarely impressed with himself.

Even after a year like 2013 — when a spectacular wedding, a second NBA championship and a fourth MVP award were among the many highlights enjoyed by the Miami Heat star — he still is, as he puts it, striving for greatness. Or, technically, more greatness, since his enormous list of accomplishments just keeps growing.

James was announced Thursday as The Associated Press' 2013 Male Athlete of the Year, becoming the third basketball player to capture the award that has been annually awarded since 1931. James received 31 of 96 votes cast in a poll of news organizations, beating Peyton Manning (20) and Jimmie Johnson (7).

"I'm chasing something and it's bigger than me as a basketball player," James told the AP.

"I believe my calling is much higher than being a basketball player. I can inspire people. Youth is huge to me. If I can get kids to look at me as a role model, as a leader, a superhero ... those things mean so much, and that's what I think I was built for. I was put here for this lovely game of basketball, but I don't think this is the biggest role that I'm going to have."

Past winners include Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Muhammad Ali, Carl Lewis, Joe Montana, Tiger Woods and Michael Phelps. Serena Williams was the AP Female Athlete of the Year, announced Wednesday.

James joins Michael Jordan and Larry Bird as NBA players to win the award.

"I don't think I've changed much this year," James said.

"I've just improved and continued to improve on

being more than just as a basketball player. I've matured as a leader, as a father, as a husband, as a friend."

So far in 2013, with a maximum of three games left to play, James has appeared in 98. The Heat have won 78 of them.

None of those was bigger than the four Miami got in the NBA Finals against San Antonio.

In Game 7, James was at his best, scoring 37 points, including the jump shot with 27.9 seconds left that essentially was the clincher. "He always rises to the occasion when it matters the most," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Business-wise, James is booming. Some estimate his annual income around \$60 million, less than one-third of that being made on the court. His wife has opened a juice bar in Miami, and David Beckham wants James to be part of the Major League Soccer team he plans on bringing to South Florida in the next couple years.

Countless people want to align with James. Few make him listen. Beckham did.

"You want to be a part of it, but it has to feel real to you," James said. "You don't want to do something that doesn't feel much to you, that you're just doing for the money. We all have money. For me, my time is more than money at this point in my life."

James has another "decision" to make in 2014. He can become a free agent again this summer, though still smarting from the circus atmosphere that followed him during his final season with the Cleveland Cavaliers four years ago, James is staying largely silent on what might happen.

He insists he has no idea.

"I'm so zoned in on what my task is here this year that it's hard to think about anything else," James said.

"A guy the other day asked me what I'm going to do for New Year's, and I haven't even thought about that."

When asked if there's any-

thing he doesn't like about Miami, James offered few complaints, other than the often-clogged street — Biscayne Boulevard, or U.S. 1 — that leads to the arena the Heat call home.

"What is there not to like about Miami?" James said. "It is a home. My family is very happy; I'm very comfortable. But U.S. 1? I wish that was a highway."

Bear in mind, he's not always unhappy when that street is gridlocked.

The last two years, he's been largely responsible for hundreds of thousands of people lining that road for Heat championship parades.

And if he gets his way, they'll be back next June. □



The Miami Heat's Dwyane Wade, right, holds the Larry O'Brien NBA Championship Trophy as LeBron James holds his Bill Russell NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Award after Game 7 of the NBA basketball championship game against the San Antonio Spurs, Friday, June 21, 2013, in Miami. Associated Press

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Heat beats Lakers 101-95 for 6th straight victory

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Chris Bosh and Dwyane Wade scored 23 points each as the Miami Heat beat the Los Angeles Lakers 101-95 on Wednesday for their sixth straight win.

Bosh also had 11 rebounds in the Heat's fifth consecutive victory against the Lakers in a Christmas Day game. LeBron James added 19 points and Ray Allen had 12.

Miami shot 51 percent (41 for 80) from the field while improving to 7-0 against the Western Conference this season. It was its 19th straight win overall against West opponents.

Nick Young scored 20 points for the Lakers, who were tied four times in the fourth quarter. Los Angeles shot 42 percent (33 for 79) in its third straight loss.

Kobe Bryant was relegated to the sideline with his fractured left knee, leaving him unable to extend

his NBA-record Christmas Day appearances to 16. Jodie Meeks had 17 points for Los Angeles, Xavier Henry added 14, and Pau Gasol had 13 points and 13 rebounds.

Jordan Farmar returned from a left hamstring tear after missing 10 games, giving the Lakers a true point guard to run the offense. But he was ineffective, with three points and two assists in 32 minutes.

WARRIORS 105, CLIPPERS 103

OAKLAND, California (AP) — Klay Thompson blocked a shot by Chris Paul and then contested Jamal Crawford's 3-pointer that fell short at the final buzzer, helping the Golden State Warriors hold off the Los Angeles Clippers in a game that featured a pair of ejections.

Paul's lay-in with 11.9 seconds left went around the rim and out, but Andre Iguodala missed a pair of

free throws with 9.3 seconds remaining. That gave the Clippers the ball back with 8.3 seconds to go.

Stephen Curry overcame a slow start to score six of his 15 points over the final 3:01 as Golden State ended the Pacific Division-leading Clippers' season-best five-game winning streak.

Blake Griffin was ejected for his second technical with 10:43 remaining after scuffling with Andrew Bogut, following Golden State's Draymond Green to the showers after they got into it at the end of the third.

THUNDER 123, KNICKS 94

NEW YORK (AP) — Kevin Durant scored 29 points and Russell Westbrook had a triple-double by the middle of the third quarter as Oklahoma rolled past New York, which played without Carmelo Anthony.

The Durant-Anthony showdown between the NBA's

top two scorers was canceled because of Anthony's sprained left ankle, so the Thunder had the Christmas spotlight to themselves while winning for the 10th time in 11 games. The 29-point victory was the largest for a road team on Christmas.

Westbrook finished with 14 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists in his first triple-double of the season and seventh of his career. Serge Ibaka added 24 points on 10-of-14 shooting.

Amare Stoudemire scored a season-high 22 points, and Tim Hardaway Jr. had 21 for the Knicks, who also were missing point guard Raymond Felton. J.R. Smith scored 20 points, but shot 8 for 22 and was booed when he left the court for good.

ROCKETS 111, SPURS 98

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — James Harden scored 28 points and Dwight Howard had 15 points and 20 re-

bounds, leading balanced Houston past San Antonio. Each of Houston's starters scored in double figures to help the Rockets improve to 2-0 against the Spurs this season. Chandler Parsons and Terrence Jones each scored 21 points, and Jeremy Lin had 13 points, eight assists and only one turnover.

Manu Ginobili led San Antonio with 22 points.

BULLS 95, NETS 78

NEW YORK (AP) — Taj Gibson scored 20 points and Jimmy Butler added 15 to help Chicago rout Brooklyn.

Butler keyed a 21-5 run that gave Chicago control in the third quarter. Returning from a right ankle injury that sidelined him a game, Butler started the burst with a 3-pointer and had a three-point play that made it 57-52.

Deron Williams scored 18 points for Brooklyn. The Nets have lost four straight. □



Los Angeles Lakers guard Kobe Bryant, left, sits on the bench with forward Shawne Williams during the first half of the Lakers' NBA basketball game against the Miami Heat in Los Angeles, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2013.
Associated Press

BETH HARRIS

AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Kobe Bryant wasn't happy about spending Christmas Day on the sideline, unable to help the struggling Los Angeles Lakers.

It's a place he's unaccustomed to being on the holiday. Bryant leads the NBA with a record 15 appearances on Christmas Day, but he's out for an expected four to six weeks with a fracture in his left knee.

No Kobe on Christmas; says recovery is 'slow'

"It's strange to be coming in on Christmas and not playing," he said before the Lakers' 101-95 loss to the Miami Heat on Wednesday. "It's a foreign feeling, but I'm here to support my guys."

LeBron James and Co. have won six in a row, and Lakers have dropped three straight.

Bryant's injury was diagnosed last week, his second major one of the season.

He didn't play his first game until Dec. 8 after nearly eight months away while recovering from a torn Achilles tendon. Then he got hurt again Dec. 17 at Memphis while playing his

fourth game in five nights. Initially, Bryant didn't think he was seriously hurt against Memphis. He went down late in the third quarter, but returned to finish out the victory in which he logged a season-high 21 points in 32 minutes.

"I didn't know it was fractured," he said. "I thought (the doctor) was joking when he told me."

Bryant has been limited to riding a bike; he isn't supposed to put any pressure on his knee.

Typical of Bryant's attention to detail, he said he has been reading critical comments that suggest he won't return this season.

"It's the same old tune,

just being sung a little more loudly now," he said. "These type of things just help me lock in more." Asked if there's any chance he won't be back, Bryant replied, "Not that I'm aware of."

Los Angeles signed the 35-year-old guard to a two-year, \$48.5 million contract extension in November.

Bryant was looking forward to playing against the defending NBA champions as a way to see where he was physically with his Achilles. Instead, he sat at the end of the bench wearing a black suit and print T-shirt.

"My spirits are fine," he said. "I feel more locked in now than my entire career." □

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Manning says TD record is temporary in today's NFL



Denver Broncos' Peyton Manning smiles as he walks off the field after he threw a touchdown pass against the Houston Texans during the fourth quarter of an NFL football game on Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013, in Houston. It was Manning's 51st touchdown pass of the season. Associated Press

ARNIE STAPLETON

AP Pro Football Writer
ENGLEWOOD, Colorado
(AP) — Peyton Manning says his season record of 51 touchdowns will be short-lived, suggesting Tom Brady will take it back soon enough. Or, for that matter, any number of other quarterbacks could break it should NFL owners get their way and expand the season to 18 games. Perhaps he's just being pragmatic. Maybe he's just being modest. "If it does go to 18 games, I think that is a practical assessment," said tight end Julius Thomas, who caught the record-breaker in Denver's 37-13 win at Houston on Sunday. "Those two extra games would give a quarterback two additional opportunities to go out there and put more touchdowns on the board. That will skew a lot of records. But you know he's also a modest person. That's who he is. It's pretty remarkable to throw 51 touchdowns. I believe records are meant to be broken and most are broken. But that's one that could stand for a while." It will stand for a long time, suggested Eric Decker, who retrieved the record-breaking memento when Thomas nonchalantly dropped it, unaware of the ball's emotional or even economic value.

"Of course he's being modest," Decker said. "Fifty-plus touchdowns in a season, you've got to do something very, very special. (Dan) Marino had it for such a long time and then it went back and forth for a while. But with the game how it is now, it's more of an offensive game and you have more opportunities to maybe do something like this." Manning began the season by becoming the first quarterback since 1969 to throw for seven touchdowns in a game, one of eight games this season in which he's thrown for four or more touchdowns. He's thrown a dozen touchdown passes to Julius Thomas and Demaryius Thomas and 10 each to Decker and Wes Welker. After breaking Brady's single-season touchdown record of 50 on Sunday, Manning is 266 yards from surpassing Drew Brees' single-season mark for yards passing. The Broncos are 18 points shy of setting a single-season scoring record and 28 points from becoming the league's first 600-point team. They're already the first team in NFL history with five players with at least 10 touchdowns; running back Knowshon Moreno has 10 touchdown runs and two touchdown catches. No-body else has had four play-

ers with double-digit touchdowns. It's reached the point where it's expected that the Broncos will put up gaudy numbers each week, and when they don't march right down the field, fans wonder what's wrong. "Yeah, we talked about that a little bit earlier in the season. If we punt, man, we would get booed," Julius Thomas said. "But it just speaks to what we've done as an offense. We have no problem with people having high expectations of us because we have high expectations of ourselves." Maybe that's why he didn't realize he had the record-holder in his hands when he caught No. 51 on Sunday and just let it go instead of holding onto it. Decker picked up the ball and tucked it in the side of his jersey, where it remained as he walked off the field. "It wouldn't have surprised me if Julius would have went and handed it to some babe up in the stands, trying to get her phone number in exchange for the ball," Manning joked. "That would be right up Julius' alley." Julius Thomas said: "If it was the right girl, maybe I'd think about it." Decker, who was pranked by Manning in the off-season, when the quarterback invited him for a weekend passing camp at Duke Uni-

versity and tricked him into thinking he had to pay thousands of dollars for doing so, saw an opportunity for pay-back.

"I was going to take (the ball) home. That's an item that is going to go for a lot," Decker said. "H got me at Duke (and) I figured this was maybe a time where I could hold the ball ransom and see what I could get out of it. But I had to give it to him, and that was such a cool thing to be a part of."

Manning can make it even more difficult to break his touchdown record when the Broncos visit the Oakland Raiders on Sunday.

Because the Broncos need to win to stay ahead of New England in the race for home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs and the Patriots kick off against Buffalo at the same time, Manning, and not his backup, Brock Osweiler, will be under center fine-tuning things before the playoffs. □

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SAT 1:50 | 4:20 | 6:55 | 9:30 | 12:05
SUN & HOL 1:50 | 4:20 | 6:55 | 9:30

THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY
MON - THURS 4:20 | 6:50 | 9:20
FRI - 4:20 | 6:50 | 9:20 | 11:50
SAT 1:55 | 4:20 | 6:50 | 9:20 | 11:50
SUN & HOL 1:55 | 4:20 | 6:50 | 9:20

LONE SURVIVOR
MON - THURS 4:00 | 6:40 | 9:20
FRI - SAT 4:00 | 6:40 | 9:20 | 12:00
SUN & HOL 4:00 | 6:40 | 9:20

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY
MON - THURS 9:15
FRI - SAT 9:15 | 11:50
SUN & HOL 9:15

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MON - FRI 4:55 | 7:05
SAT, SUN & HOL 2:45 | 4:55 | 7:05

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3D VERSION
MON - THURS 4:00 | 5:05 | 6:20 | 7:30 | 8:45
FRI 4:00 | 5:05 | 6:20 | 7:30 | 8:45 | 9:55 | 11:10
SAT 1:55 | 2:40 | 4:00 | 5:05 | 6:20 | 7:30 | 8:45 | 9:55 | 11:10
SUN & HOL 1:55 | 2:40 | 4:00 | 5:05 | 6:20 | 7:30 | 8:45

ANCHORMAN 2
THE LEGION CONTINUES
MON - THURS 4:00 | 6:35 | 9:10
FRI - SAT 4:00 | 6:35 | 9:10 | 11:45
SUN & HOL 4:00 | 6:35 | 9:10

THE HOBBIT
MON - THURS 5:25 | 8:45
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SAT 2:05 | 5:25 | 8:45
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Tsonga beats Murray in Mubadala Championship



Andy Murray of Britain reacts during a match against Jo-Wilfried Tsonga of France during the first day of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Thursday Dec. 26, 2013.

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP)

— Wimbledon champion Andy Murray lost his comeback match from a three-month injury layoff in the opening round of the Mubadala Championship on Thursday.

Murray lost 7-5, 6-3 to Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in 72 minutes.

Tsonga will meet Novak Djokovic in the semifinals of the exhibition event on Friday, while Rafael Nadal will take on Spanish compatriot David Ferrer in the other semi.

Ferrer, who last week dumped his longtime coach Javier Piles, beat Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland 7-5, 6-1.

Murray, who hadn't played since Davis Cup in mid-September because of a back complaint, kept pace with Tsonga until 5-5. Even to that point, Murray's rustiness was obvious with accumulating unforced errors. After Tsonga broke Murray for the first time, he stayed in charge.

"I was feeling fine with my body and the knee, and this win over someone like Murray is going to give me great confidence as I start the new season," Tsonga said.

Murray, who will take on Wawrinka for fifth place on Friday, said: "The court was very quick and needed quick reaction. Tsonga was definitely sharper." □

Posting period for Japanese pitcher Mashiro Tanaka starts

HOWIE RUMBERG

AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The bidding for Japanese star pitcher Masahiro Tanaka has begun.

All 30 major league teams have been notified that the 30-day period to sign the 25-year-old right-hander began at 1300 GMT Thursday, according to Major League Baseball spokesman Michael Teevan. Clubs have until 2200 GMT on Jan. 24 to attempt to reach an agreement with the ace.

If Tanaka and a MLB team come to terms, that franchise is required to pay his Japanese club, the Rakuten Eagles, a posting fee, now capped at \$20 million under a deal reached two weeks ago between MLB and Nippon Professional Baseball. Under the old, no-limit system, the Texas Rangers paid over \$50 million for the right to negotiate with Yu Darvish before the 2012 season.

Tanaka will be represented by Excel Sports Management during the process. Other Excel Sports clients include Los Angeles Dodgers two-time Cy Young Award winner Clayton Kershaw and New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter. Rakuten rejected the new posting system but was outvoted in balloting by Japan's 12 teams. The Japan Series champion then said it was going to retain Tanaka, whose rights it holds for two more seasons.

Eagles President Yozo Tachibana, however,



Rakuten Golden Eagles President Yozo Tachibana speaks at a press conference after a meeting with his team ace Masahiro Tanaka, in Sendai, northern Japan Wednesday, Dec. 25 2013.

Associated Press

changed course on Wednesday, saying Tanaka deserved a chance to play in the majors. Tachibana cited Tanaka's 24-0 regular-season record with a 1.27 ERA and his "outstanding contribution to the team" over seven seasons as reasons for choosing to post the player. A day after throwing a complete game in a Game 6 loss in the Japan Series, Tanaka saved the clincher, bringing the first league championship to

the team based in Sendai, which is still recovering from the devastation wrought by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Several major league teams argued that under the system established in 1998, only the richest franchises could afford to bid on the right to sign Japanese players still under club control. The new system levels the process — and also means the player could get a contract around \$100 million. □

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Columbus Blue Jackets sign Danish RW Oliver Bjorkstrand

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP)

— The Columbus Blue Jackets have signed Danish right wing Oliver Bjorkstrand of the Western Hockey League's Portland Winterhawks to a three-year, entry-level contract.

Bjorkstrand was the club's

fifth pick, 89th overall, in the 2013 NHL draft.

The Dane has 25 goals and 31 assists and a +21 plus/minus rating in 32 games this season. He's currently tied for third in the league in short-handed goals (3), fourth in goals and points, tied for

seventh in game-winning goals (4) and eighth in assists and plus/minus.

Bjorkstrand, who represented his country at the 2012 World Junior Championships, has 56 goals and 63 assists and a +59 plus/minus rating in 97 career WHL games. □



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Websites try to fight nasty comments, anonymity

BARBARA ORTUTAY

AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Mix blatant bigotry with poor spelling. Add a dash of ALL CAPS. Top it off with a violent threat. And there you have it: A recipe for the worst of online comments.

Blame anonymity, blame politicians, blame human nature. But a growing number of websites are reining in online commentary. Companies including Google and The Huffington Post are trying everything from deploying moderators to forcing people to use their real names. Some sites, such as Popular Science, are banning comments altogether.

The efforts put sites in a delicate position. User comments add a lively, fresh feel. And, of course, the longer visitors stay to read the posts, and the more they come back, the more a site can charge for advertising.

What websites don't want is the kind of nastiness that appeared under a recent CNN.com article about the Affordable Care Act. "If it were up to me, you progressive libs destroying this country would be hanging from the gallows for treason. People are awakening though. If I were you, I'd be very afraid," wrote someone using the name "JBlaze." YouTube, which is owned by Google, has long been home to some of the Internet's most juvenile and

grammatically incorrect comments. The video site caused a stir last month when it began requiring people to log into Google Plus to write a comment. Besides herding users to Google's unified network, the company says the move is designed to raise the level of discourse.

A Cheerios cereal commercial featuring an interracial family met with such a barrage of racist responses on YouTube in May that General Mills shut down comments on it altogether.

"Starting this week, when you're watching a video on YouTube, you'll see comments sorted by people you care about first," wrote YouTube product manager Nundu Janakiram and principal engineer Yonatan Zunger in a blog post announcing the changes.

Anonymity has always been a major appeal of online life. Two decades ago, The New Yorker magazine ran a cartoon with a dog sitting in front of a computer, one paw on the keyboard. The caption read: "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

At its best, anonymity allows people to speak freely without repercussions. It allows whistle blowers and protesters to express unpopular opinions. At its worst, it allows people to spout off without repercussions. It gives trolls and bullies license to pick arguments, threaten



In this Wednesday, Feb. 27, 2013 photo illustration, hands type on a computer keyboard in Los Angeles. Associated Press

and abuse.

But anonymity has been eroding. On the Internet, many people may know not only your name, but also your latest musings, the songs you've listened to, your job history and who your friends are.

"It's not so much that our offline lives are going online, it's that our offline and online lives are more integrated," says Mark Lashley, a professor of communications at La Salle University. Facebook, which requires people to use their real names, played a big part in the seismic shift.

"As more people go online and we put more of our lives online, we should be held accountable for things we say," Lashley said.

Nearly three-quarters of teens and young adults think people are more likely to use discriminatory language online or in text messages than in face-to-face conversa-

tions, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and MTV. The poll didn't distinguish between anonymous comments and those with real identities attached.

The Huffington Post is clamping down on vicious comments. In addition to employing 40 human moderators who sift through readers' posts for racism, homophobia, hate speech and the like, the AOL-owned news site is chipping away at anonymous commenting. Previously, anyone could respond to an article posted on the site by creating an account, without tying it to an email address. This year, HuffPo began requiring people to verify their identity by connecting their accounts to an email address.

"We are reaching a place where the Internet is growing up," says Jimmy Soni, managing editor

of HuffPo. "These changes represent a maturing (online) environment."

The lack of total anonymity, while not a failsafe method, offers people a "gut check moment," Soni says.

Newspapers are also turning toward regulated comments. Of the largest 137 U.S. newspapers — those with daily circulation above 50,000 — nearly 49 percent ban anonymous commenting, according to Arthur Santana, assistant communications professor at the University of Houston. Nearly 42 percent allow anonymity, while 9 percent do not have comments at all.

In some cases, sites have gone further. Popular Science, the 141-year-old science and technology magazine, stopped allowing comments of any kind on its news articles in September.

While highlighting responses to articles about climate change and abortion, Popular Science online editor Suzanne LaBarre announced the change and explained in a blog post that comments can be "bad for science."

Because "comments sections tend to be a grotesque reflection of the media culture surrounding them, the cynical work of undermining bedrock scientific doctrine is now being done beneath our own stories," wrote LaBarre. □

Stocks up on job news; Bond yields rise

KEN SWEET

AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The stock market continued its upward climb Thursday as traders went back to work after the Christmas holiday, adding to what has already been a historic year for the market.

Traders were encouraged by an unexpectedly large drop in claims for unemployment benefits last week, the latest sign that

important 3 percent mark. It hasn't been that high since September.

The Dow Jones industrial average rose 122.33 points, or 0.8 percent, to 16,479.88. It was the 50th record high close for the Dow this year. The index is up 25.8 percent so far in 2013, on pace to have its best year since 1996.

The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 8.70 points, or 0.5 percent, to 1,842.02

the yield on the 10-year Treasury note to 2.99 percent from 2.98 percent Tuesday. The note briefly traded above 3 percent.

Yields have been climbing since late November as economic reports have suggested that the U.S. recovery is gaining momentum. The increase accelerated last week after the Federal Reserve announced it was cutting back on its bond-buying

U.S. Bank Wealth Management.

Yields on Treasury securities like the 10-year note are used to calculate interest rates on student loans, mortgage rates, credit cards, and many other kinds of debt. As the 10-year yield has risen in the last six months, so have mortgage rates. In early May, the average mortgage rate was around 3.35 percent. This week it was 4.48 percent, according to the government mortgage agency Freddie Mac.

"We are starting to take the medication away from the bond market, but it's important to note that yields are still at historically low levels," said Dan Veru, chief investment officer of Palisade Capital Management, which manages \$4.5 billion in assets.

Investors cheered the latest signal that the U.S. economy is improving. The Labor Department said the number of Americans who filed for unemployment benefits fell 42,000 last week to 338,000. The drop was far bigger than economists were expecting and an indication that fewer people were losing their jobs.

It was another slow day for Wall Street, with most investors on vacation for Christmas and only three trading days left in 2013. Approximately 1.96 billion shares traded hands on the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday, well below the daily average of 3.3 billion shares. □



In this photo provided by the New York Stock Exchange Euronext, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member Darlene Love rings the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. (AP Photo/Ben Hider)

the U.S. job market is improving. Trading volume was very low, however, as most portfolio managers have closed out their positions for the year.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury note, a benchmark for many kinds of loans, briefly crossed above the psychologically

and the Nasdaq composite was up 11.76 points, or 0.3 percent, to 4,167.18. With Thursday's gains, the S&P 500 is up 29.2 percent for the year, or 31.3 percent when dividends are included. The S&P is on track for its best year since 1997.

Bond prices fell, pushing

program. The yield last touched 3 percent in September. It hasn't been consistently above 3 percent since July 2011.

"There's a silver lining to see bond yields rise like this, because it's a sign that the economy is getting stronger," said John De Clue, chief investment officer of

McDonald's closes employee website amid criticism

The Associated Press

McDonald's Corp. has shut down a website intended to provide employees with work and life guidance after it generated negative publicity for the fast-food company.

The McResource program has been criticized for creating unrealistic budgets and offering advice that was out of touch with its workers' pay. The website, which was run by an outside company, also reportedly discouraged workers from eating fast food.

McDonald's, based in Oak Brook, Illinois, said Thursday that it is having its vendor take down the website.

"Between links to irrelevant or outdated information, along with outside groups taking elements out of context, this created unwarranted scrutiny and inappropriate commentary," the company said in a statement.

Earlier this year, media and labor groups criticized the website for content including sample budgets for employees that were

based on holding two jobs and included no costs for heating, as well as suggestions on what to tip a personal fitness trainer or au pair.

One critic, the "Low Pay is Not Okay" campaign, was one of the groups behind strikes and rallies by fast-food workers and labor organizers earlier this month that demanded better pay. While efforts vary by state, organizers are hoping to build public support to raise the federal minimum wage of \$7.25, or

about \$15,000 a year for full-time work.

And in an embarrassing moment for McDonald's, the world's largest hamburger chain, CNBC reported last week that the McResource website discouraged eating fast food as part of its tips for healthy living.

While it has shut down the website, McDonald's said it plans to continue an internal telephone help line through which the majority of its employees access its work-life help resources. □

Delta to honor extremely cheap mistake fares

SCOTT MAYEROWITZ

AP Airlines Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Some lucky fliers capitalized on a computer glitch Thursday and scored some really cheap flights on Delta Air Lines.

From about 10 a.m. to noon (1500 GMT to 1700 GMT), certain Delta fares on the airline's own website and other airfare booking sites were showing up incorrectly, offering some savvy bargain hunters incredible deals. A roundtrip flight between Cincinnati and Minneapolis for February was being sold for just \$25.05 and a roundtrip between Cincinnati and Salt Lake City for \$48.41. The correct price for both of those fares is more than \$400. Trebor Banstetter, a spokesman for the Atlanta-based airline, said the problem has been fixed but "Delta will honor any fares purchased at the incorrect price."

Jackie Fanelli, 27, learned about the super cheap fares from a friend's Facebook page. She attempted to purchase a \$98 roundtrip first-class ticket from her home city of Baltimore to Honolulu on Priceline.com but the transaction didn't process before the deal was shut down.

"It was too good to be true," Fanelli said. "I try to go away every other year and this was not the year." Delta's website was having lingering problems from the increased traffic Thursday afternoon.

"It looks like Delta's programmers had a little too much eggnog yesterday," joked George Hobica, founder of AirfareWatchDog.com, which promotes airfare sales. It's likely that the airline tried to tweak its fares with a \$10 or \$20 system-wide change and a junior programmer made a mistake or two, he said.

"People just go wild. People have been bragging about booking six first-class tickets to Hawaii," Hobica said. "People hate the airlines so much that when this happens, they say: I'm going to get back at you for the time you broke my suitcase and didn't pay for it." □

Closing the chapter: 2013 lessons for investors

STEVE ROTHWELL
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Successful stock investors followed some simple advice this year: Don't worry, be happy.

Next year, though, they will need to temper that rosy approach.

In 2013, investors who blocked out the scary headlines about a possible government default, budget cuts, and concerns about when the Federal Reserve would begin to scale back its stimulus, did great. The economy wasn't robust, but it wasn't weak either. Earnings grew, even if companies achieved them by cutting costs rather than increasing sales. And the Fed gave the market a year-end bonus by keeping short-term borrowing costs near zero, even after dialing back its program to hold down longer-term rates.

Final tally: Stocks are up more than 28 percent.

The worrier's ultimate refuge — cash, bonds, and gold — actually caused even more heartburn. Havens like bonds are down this year: The biggest category of bond funds by assets, intermediate-term bond funds, has lost an average of 1.5 percent. Gold is having its first down year since 2000, having declined 27.7 percent.

Market strategists, on average, see more modest growth for stocks in 2014. The S&P 500 could rise 5 to 7 percent. Bonds should continue to struggle as interest rates and expected to rise.

Here are the positives from 2013 and some tempering thoughts for 2014.

2013 highlights

— **SMALL CAPS WERE BIG:** Here's where the stock optimists really shown. The Russell 2000, an index that tracks smaller, riskier stocks, is up nearly 37 percent, more than the Dow and the S&P 500.

— **STUNNING DEBUTS:** IPOs are risky and also for positive thinkers. And they surged this year. The num-

ber of initial public offerings rose to its highest since 2000. When stock prices rise steadily and strongly, companies have incentive to roll out their stocks

of 29 percent from 2012.

— **NO HOLDING BACK:** Another streak for bulls. The S&P 500 has gone 27 months without a downturn

expensive, or do they stay on the sidelines and risk being left further behind? 2014 predictions

— **WATCH OUT FOR**

bond funds since the market bottomed in March 2009.

Professional investors worry that the average Joe will now try to make up for lost



CEO of Hilton Worldwide Christopher Nassetta, center, poses in a Hilton robe after his company's IPO began trading on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2013. Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc. is the world's largest hotel group, with 665,667 rooms across 90 countries and territories.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

to the public. And investors want those new shares. The average IPO stock rose almost 35 percent this year, outperforming the S&P 500, according to data from Renaissance Capital. In total, companies sold \$55 billion of stock in 2013, an increase

of 10 percent or more. That compares with an average streak of 18 months between such declines, according to S&P Capital IQ. Investors who sat out the rally in stocks are now left with a quandary. Do they buy now, with stocks more

CROWDS: After being burned during the financial crisis, many investors have stayed away from this five-year bull market. Investors pulled \$430 billion out of stock funds, according to data from Lipper, while putting nearly \$1 trillion into

time in 2014. If large numbers individual investors jump, the demand could inflate prices beyond what earnings justify. That could lead to what Wall Street call a "melt-up," which almost always leads to a "melt-down." □

Money market fund assets rose \$22.09 billion

The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Total U.S. money market mutual fund assets rose \$22.09 billion to \$2.697 trillion for the week that ended Monday, according to the Investment Company Institute.

Assets in the nation's retail money market mutual funds rose \$1.27 billion to \$926.93 billion, the Washington-based mutual fund trade group said Thursday. Assets of taxable money market funds in the retail category rose \$450 million to \$731.63 billion. Tax-exempt retail fund assets rose \$810 million to \$195.3 billion.

Assets in institutional money market funds rose by \$20.82 billion to \$1.77 trillion. Among institutional funds, taxable money market fund assets increased by \$21.47 billion to \$1.695 trillion. Assets of tax-exempt funds fell \$640 million to \$74.8 billion. The seven-day average yield on money market mutual funds was unchanged at 0.01 percent from the previous week, according to Money Fund Report, a service of iMoneyNet Inc. in Westborough, Mass. The seven-day compounded yield was flat at 0.01 percent. The 30-day

yield and the 30-day compounded yield were both unchanged at 0.01 percent, Money Fund Report said Wednesday. The average maturity of portfolios held by money market mutual funds fell to 48 days from 50 days from the prior week.

The online service Bankrate.com said its survey of 100 leading commercial banks, savings and loan associations and savings banks in the nation's 10 largest markets showed the annual percentage yield available on money market accounts was unchanged at

0.12 percent.

The North Palm Beach, Florida-based unit of Bankrate Inc. said Wednesday that the annual percentage yield available on interest-bearing checking accounts remained steady at 0.05 percent. Bankrate.com said the annual percentage yield on six-month certificates of deposit was unchanged at 0.14 percent, one-year CD yields rose 0.01 percentage point to 0.23 percent and remained steady at 0.36 percent on two-year CDs. The five-year yield was also unchanged at 0.78 percent. □

Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

	2			8		5	
5							6
	7		9			1	
6				1		9	
		4		3			8
	3				9		7
8							4
	6		5			2	

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

12/27

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

2	1	4	3	8	5	9	6	7
3	6	5	1	9	7	2	8	4
8	7	9	6	4	2	3	5	1
1	5	3	8	2	9	7	4	6
4	9	7	5	3	6	8	1	2
6	2	8	4	7	1	5	3	9
7	8	6	9	1	3	4	2	5
5	4	2	7	6	8	1	9	3
9	3	1	2	5	4	6	7	8

ACROSS

- oneself; prepare for bad news
- It was, to a poet
- Large stringed instrument
- Revolving part in an engine
- Sworn statement
- "The Buckeye State"
- Love, in France
- Birch or cedar
- "A" home is his castle"
- Perverted
- Unwilling
- Flower stalk
- Jam-packed
- Give shelter to
- Oomph
- Afternoon hour
- Blanket
- Standing straight
- Forest animal
- Digs for ore
- Cabbage kin
- Proprietor
- Nuisances
- Regret
- Vatican leaders
- Granny Smiths & McIntoshes
- Fall month
- Bring on board
- Need for water
- Faithfulness
- Helpful cue
- Long poem
- Island greeting
- On ; nervous
- Danger
- Talk out of
- Walter Army Medical Center
- Rolls the hair
- Get on one's feet

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16		
17					18					19		
20					21			22	23			
			24				25					
26	27	28				29						
30					31	32			33	34	35	36
37			38		39				40	41		
42				43	44				45	46		
			47		48			49	50			
51	52	53					54					
55						56				57	58	59
60					61	62			63			
64					65				66			
67					68				69			

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/27/13

Thursday's Puzzle Solved

MALE	SLABS	ADDS
IRON	PILOT	DRIP
NETS	AFIRE	VANE
EASIEST	DAMAGED	
	GYM	FELON
STONE	AIR	SCALD
CUSS	CUR	TEETER
ABC	PAGEBOY	IIVE
LEADER	MAY	PLEA
ERRED	PAN	DATED
	GABON	MAC
SCARLET	HABITAT	
ILKA	AARON	FINE
LAI	STILL	INNS
TYNE	TODDY	CYST

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12/27/13

- Unpredictable
- Tribal pole
- Hospital room with many beds
- Consumed
- Scissors
- Student's assignment
- Beatles hit "Day's Night"
- Hose down
- Got ready to be photographed
- Snake's poison
- Cast a ballot
- Heals
- Hullabaloo
- Once again
- Sharp-witted
- Trait
- transmitters
- Deadly reptile
- Late Chief Justice Warren
- Classic board game
- Pegs for Els
- on; gave an account of

DOWN

- Pitt or Garrett
- Italy's capital
- Perched upon
- Of ; certainly

- Prim & serious
- Reiner & Lowe
- Bed coverings
- out; weakens
- Bit of hamster food
- "A rose by any name..."
- Scold
- Color slightly
- Rubes
- Clenched hand
- Tiny bit
- At that time
- Three feet
- Lemon meringue

Pouring cheese on icy roads in, where else, Wisconsin, 'America's Dairyland'

STEVEN YACCINO

© 2013 New York Times

MILWAUKEE - In a state whose license plates advertise it as America's Dairyland, where lawmakers once honored the bacterium in Monterey Jack as the state's official microbe and where otherwise sober citizens wear foam cheesehead hats, road crews are trying to thaw freezing Wisconsin streets with a material that smells a little like mozzarella.

This month, Milwaukee began a pilot program to repurpose cheese brine for use in keeping city roads from freezing, mixing the dairy waste with traditional rock salt as a way to trim costs and ease pollution.

"You want to use provolone or mozzarella," said Jeffrey A. Tews, the fleet operations manager for the public works department, which has thrice spread the cheesy substance in Bay View, a

neighborhood on Milwaukee's south side. "Those have the best salt content. You have to do practically nothing to it." Local governments across the country have been experimenting with cheaper and environmentally friendly ways of thawing icy thoroughfares, trying everything from sugar beet juice to discarded brewery grain in an attempt to limit the use of road salt, which can spread too thin, wash away and pollute waterways.

Snow science experts say an attempt to recycle the salty brine that flavors cheese was only a matter of time, particularly in a state like Wisconsin.

"We're just trying to make every possible use of cheese," said Tony Zielinski, an alderman who represents the Bay View district, adding that local governments in other states have called him to learn more about the program. "If this takes off, if this proves to be

a success here, I'm sure that it will be used in cities all over the country." But in this dense urban setting, Milwaukee officials are reviewing a list of potential problems that come with cheese-coated streets: Would a faint odor of cheese bother residents? Would it attract rodents? Would the benefits of cheese brine, said to freeze at a lower temperature than regular salt brine, be enough to justify the additional hauling and storing requirements? If at first it sounded like a joke, the reality of tapping the wellspring of dairy byproduct has become a serious budget-slimming conversation. Chuck Engdahl, the waste water manager at F&A Dairy Products in northwestern Wisconsin, said his company now donates most of the excess liquid to a handful of municipalities willing to cart it away, including Milwaukee, saving about \$20,000 a year in hauling costs. □



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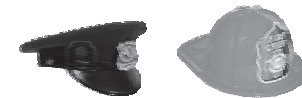
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Indonesia cave reveals history of ancient tsunamis

MARGIE MASON
Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)

— A cave discovered near the source of Indonesia's massive earthquake-spawned tsunami contains the footprints of past gigantic waves dating up to 7,500 years ago, a rare natural record that suggests the next disaster could be centuries away — or perhaps only decades.

The findings provide the longest and most detailed timeline for tsunamis that have occurred off the far western tip of Sumatra island in Aceh province. That's where 100-foot (30-meter) waves triggered by a magnitude-9.1 earthquake on Dec. 26, 2004, killed 230,000 people in several countries, more than half of them in Indonesia.

The limestone cave, located within a couple hundred yards (meters) of the coast near Banda Aceh, is about 3 feet (1 meter) above knee-high tide and protected from storms and wind. Only huge waves that inundate the coastal area are able to gush inside. Researchers in 2011 uncovered seabed sand deposits that were swept into the cave over thousands of years and neatly layered between bat droppings like a geological cake. Radiocarbon analysis of materials, including clamshells and the remains of microscopic organisms, provided evidence of 11 tsunamis before 2004.

The disasters were by no means evenly spaced, said lead researcher Charles Rubin from the Earth Observatory of Singapore. The last one occurred about 2,800 years ago, but there were four others in the preceding



In this Monday, Dec. 2, 2013 photo, a guide stands at the entrance of a cave which scientists said reveals history of ancient tsunamis in Lhong, Aceh province, Indonesia.

500 years.

And it's possible there were others. Researchers know, for instance, that there were two mammoth earthquakes in the region around 1393 and 1450. Rubin said a big tsunami could have carried away evidence of other events through erosion.

The scientists are still working to determine the size of the waves that entered the cave. "The take-home message is perhaps that the 2004 event doesn't mean it won't happen for another 500 years," said Rubin, who added that the cave was discovered by chance and not part of planned field work. "We did see them clustered together closer in time. I wouldn't put out a warning that we're going to have an earthquake, but it shows that the timing is really variable."

The quake that triggered the 2004 tsunami surprised scientists because the fault that unleashed the megathrust temblor had

been quiet for hundreds of years. And since the last big earthquake had struck more than 500 years earlier, there was no surviving oral history that could have helped people understand the risk.

Since 2004, much research has been done to try to learn about the area's past by examining sand deposits, uplifted coral and GPS data.

"The findings are very significant," Katrin Monecke,

a geosciences professor at Wellesley College in Massachusetts wrote in an email. She worked on tsunami sand deposits discovered in marshes in the area, but was not involved with the cave research, which was presented this month at an American Geophysical Union conference in San Francisco. "The sand sheets in the cave cover a very long time span and give an excellent idea about earth-

quake frequency."

Despite the long record preserved in the cave, Rubin said it did not provide any clear clues about tsunami frequency or when events might happen in a relatively close period of time. Geologist Kerry Sieh, director of the Singapore group and also part of the cave investigation, has predicted that another monster quake could rock the area in the next few decades. They tend to come in cycles and the 2004 temblor heaped more pressure on the fault. However, the history is so variable, it's impossible to make an exact forecast.

"By learning about the type of tsunamis that happened in the past, maybe we can do planning for mitigation for the next tsunami," said Nazli Ismail, head of the physics and geophysics department at Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh who worked on the project.

Indonesia is an archipelago located on the so-called "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe of fault lines and volcanoes surrounding the Pacific Basin. It is home to some of the world's biggest and deadliest seismic activity. □

Associated Press

Holiday lights: New views of Saturn and its moons

PASADENA, California (AP)

— A NASA spacecraft has sent holiday greetings from the outer solar system.

The space agency on Monday released dazzling new images of the ringed planet Saturn and its moons. The Cassini spacecraft took the pictures earlier this year.

Saturn resembled an ornament in one image, with a jet stream swirling at its north pole along with a hurricane-like storm.

Cassini also peered through the hazy atmosphere of Saturn's largest moon, Titan, revealing hydrocarbon lakes. The icy Saturn moon Enceladus appears as a white snowball.



This July 29, 2013 image provided by NASA shows that Winter is approaching in the southern hemisphere of Saturn and with this cold season has come the familiar blue hue that was present in the northern winter hemisphere at the start of NASA's Cassini mission.

Associated Press

Cassini, funded by NASA and the European and Italian space agencies, was launched in 1997. The

spacecraft reached Saturn in 2004 and has been studying the planet and its many moons. □

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'American Hustle' a portrait of swank '70s fashion

SANDY COHEN

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — From Christian Bale's burgundy velvet blazer to Amy Adams' plunging sequin halter dress, "American Hustle" is a cinematic romp through the over-the-top styles of the 1970s.

Set in New York and New Jersey in 1978, the film tells the story of a pair of con artists (Bale and Adams) forced to work for a cocky FBI agent (Bradley Cooper) bent on bringing down powerbrokers and politicians. This decadent world of power, crime and big money comes to life through ostentatious fashions and outrageous hairdos. All the characters are reinventing themselves, and it shows in their clothes. "They had ideas, they lived large and they took risks," costume designer Michael Wilkinson said of the '70s styles that inspired his designs. "Clothes were less

structured, had less underpinnings — it was like people didn't give a damn."

Though the Australian-born Wilkinson said his childhood was drenched in American pop culture, "I approached this as a research project, just like you would study about the Greek ruins or outer galaxy."

He scoured Cosmopolitan magazine, along with advertisements, movies and TV shows of the era. "Goodfellas" and "Atlantic City" were particularly influential films.

"And 'Saturday Night Fever' from 1977," Wilkinson added.

"(That) had the most pertinence to Bradley Cooper's character. He's a guy from the Bronx, and he lived life as a black-and-white moral shooter working for the FBI, and wears a cheap polyester suit that doesn't fit him so well."

The character ups his fashion game after meeting



This film image released by Sony Pictures shows, from left, Amy Adams, as Sydney Prosser, Bradley Cooper, as Richie Dimaso, Jeremy Renner, as Mayor Carmine Polito, Christian Bale as Irving Rosenfeld, and Jennifer Lawrence as Rosalyn Rosenfeld, in a scene from "American Hustle."

Associated Press

the dapper con-couple. "He ends up in a silk shirt and silk scarf, which are pop-culture references," Wilkinson said.

"And then he wears a leather jacket to the FBI." The designer relished in Halston's vintage vault, to which he was granted access for the film, and he dressed Adams in authen-

tic pieces from the '70s. "The lines (of clothing silhouettes) of the late '70s, with designers like Halston, were reinventing the wardrobe of women," he said. "It was about being comfortable in your skin and walking tall."

Hair is so prominent in "American Hustle," it's practically another char-

acter. Lead hairstylist Katharine Gordon studied old issues of Playboy and high-school yearbooks from the '70s for inspiration.

She and Bale worked together to create his character's elaborate comb-over, complete with fuzzy, glue-on hairpiece. The film opens with a scene of its careful construction. □

Family disputes claims in Norman Rockwell book

BOSTON (AP) — The family of the late Norman Rockwell is taking exception to a new biography of the American illustrator, saying it contains numerous inaccuracies and poses a "phantom theory" about his sexuality.

"American Mirror: The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell," by Deborah Solomon, was published in November.

In a statement released by the Norman Rockwell Family Agency, family members said they found at least 96 factual errors in the book, that the author misused sources and made "highly selective" use of Rockwell's own autobiography "My Adventures as an Illustrator." Rockwell, who lived in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, illustrated more than 300 covers for the Saturday Evening Post. He died in 1978.

The family, in its statement, referred to one passage in the book in which Solomon describes how Rockwell went to schools at recess

and stopped little boys on the street, and that such behavior might be seen as problematic in today's world.

The passage ignores Rockwell's own explanation in his autobiography that after he persuaded a boy to pose for an illustration, they would go together to ask the child's mother for permission, the family said.

"She supports this unfounded claim with another phantom theory, that Rockwell was a closeted homosexual," the statement read. In an interview in October with The Wall Street Journal, Solomon, who also authored biographies of artists Jackson Pollock and Joseph Cornell, was quoted as saying she did not believe Rockwell had homosexual relationships in his life, but added that he preferred male company and that it was possible to discern "enormous homoeroticism" from his work. She said she was not attempting to speculate on his psychology. □

Debbie Allen's twist on 'The Nutcracker' wins

MARK KENNEDY

AP Drama Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It's not yet Christmas, but Debbie Allen has already gotten a nice present — the Goldstar National Nutcracker Award.

The ticket discounter has declared the award-winning director and choreographer's school the winner of the 7th annual contest that crowns the best version of "The Nutcracker" in the land.

The Debbie Allen Dance Academy's show, "The Hot Chocolate Nutcracker" that was mounted earlier this month in Los Angeles, beat out nearly 60 other productions of "The Nutcracker." It's Allen's second time winning the award. Her show begins when young Kara Johnson receives a nutcracker filled with hot chocolate, falls asleep and the nut-



This May 3, 2013 file photo shows Debbie Allen at the Geffen gala at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

cracker comes alive. Written and directed by the "Fame" star, the show stars Allen and Carlo Imperato and had an original score by Mariah Carey, Arturo Sandoval, Chau-Giang Thi Nguyen, James Ingram and Thump. Voting for the Goldstar Na-

tional Nutcracker Award is determined by Goldstar members who rate and review "The Nutcracker" productions they recently attended. Allen's academy, which was founded by Allen and Norman Nixon in 2001, will also win a cash prize. □

Marty and Leo team up again for 'Wolf'

JAKE COYLE
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "Anything goes" was the guiding ethos for Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio in making their extravagant dark comedy of Wall Street excess, "The Wolf of Wall Street."

"We would look at each other and ask, 'Are we going too far?'" says DiCaprio. Rarely was the answer "yes."

The two longtime collaborators pushed the based-on-a-true-story tale to the limits of outrageousness, decency and MPAA approval. With pinstripe suits instead of togas, it's their "Satyricon," their "Caligula": a nearly three-hour-long orgy of money, sex and drugs.

The partnership between the 71-year-old Scorsese and DiCaprio, 39, has now stretched over five films and more than a dozen years. They've together been able to carve out a space for the kind of daring Hollywood typically shuns. "Anything goes" is far from the mantra of today's movie business.

"I don't think people really quite understand how unique this movie is," says DiCaprio, while Scorsese, sitting next to him, nods. "No matter what they think of the movie, you do not see films like this hap-



This Dec. 15, 2013 photo shows American actor Leonardo DiCaprio, left, with American film director Martin Scorsese in New York. DiCaprio stars in the Scorsese film, "The Wolf of Wall Street."

Associated Press

pening." Scorsese and DiCaprio recently sat down for a joint interview to discuss their latest film, which opens on Christmas Day. On the surface, they exude the dynamic of master and pupil. But they're on more equal footing, bonded by a desire to make movies like those from the '70s that DiCaprio grew up admiring and Scorsese actually made. In the last 13 years, Scorsese has made only one fictional film ("Hugo") that didn't star DiCaprio.

"Over the years, it's been about learning more, fine-tuning the instruments together, so to speak, and discovering more from each other in the process," says Scorsese. They co-produced "The Wolf of Wall Street," which Warner Bros. turned down in 2008 before it was reborn with Paramount Pictures.

Ironically, Scorsese was tipped off to DiCaprio's talent from the actor he's most associated with: Robert De Niro. After De Niro

made 1993's "This Boy's Life," he recommended an 18-year-old DiCaprio to Scorsese. That would spark a pairing that has grown to rival De Niro's own with Scorsese (eight films).

DiCaprio was in his mid-20s when he sought out a part in Scorsese's bloody New York tale, "Gangs of New York." The Howard Hughes biopic, "The Aviator," followed, a movie that DiCaprio (who landed his first lead actor Oscar nomination) suggested to

Scorsese. Then came the Boston crime flick "The Departed" (earning Scorsese his first directing Academy Award) and the '50s noir "Shutter Island." "It hasn't been calculated at all," says DiCaprio. "I brought projects to him. Projects have come to us. And we just kind of both said, 'Yes, that's the type of movie we want to do.' It's been this really natural progression. We've taken more and more chances. And, certainly I've grown more as an actor having a trusted ally." "The Wolf of Wall Street," written by Terence Winter ("Boardwalk Empire"), is adapted from Jordan Belfort's memoir about his heady rise from a Long Island penny stock trader to a wealthy stock swindler presiding over the brokerage firm Stratton Oakmont. Schooled by an early boss (Matthew McConaughey) on the "fairy dust" that is high finance, Belfort recklessly plunders his clients' pockets to make himself rich and to finance a parade of prostitutes, cocaine and Quaaludes. DiCaprio calls the movie "a biography of a scumbag."

"It has to be seen. It has to be experienced," says Scorsese. "If it raises the ire of some people, that might be a good thing because it makes you think about it." □



Ricky Lawson is photographed in Kansas City, Mo. on Feb. 23, 1988.

Associated Press

Drummer Ricky Lawson, 59, dies after aneurism

LONG BEACH, California (AP) — Studio drummer Ricky Lawson, a collaborator with musicians including Michael Jackson, Eric Clapton, Phil Collins and Whitney Houston, has died at a suburban Los Angeles hospital following a brain aneurism. He was 59.

Lawson's uncle, Paul Riser of Detroit, said Tuesday that Lawson was removed from life support 10 days after the aneurism diagnosis and died around 7 p.m. Monday.

Lawson was being treated at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center in Long

Beach, California, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Los Angeles.

The Detroit native learned to play drums at age 16 and jumped into the music business even before graduating from Cooley High School, developing into one of the nation's top studio musicians in the 1980s.

His work appears on Houston's version of "I Will Always Love You." He also performed with Al Jarreau, George Benson, Bette Midler, Quincy Jones and many others.

A founding member of the Yellowjackets, Lawson

won a Grammy Award in 1986 for R&B instrumental performance for the jazz-fusion group's hit "And You Know That."

He became disoriented during a performance on Dec. 13 and was diagnosed with an aneurism.

Drummer Questlove Jenkins of The Roots called Lawson "the master" on Twitter Dec. 18 in a message saying, "praying for his recovery."

Drummer Sheila E. tweeted Tuesday: "We lost a great man, drummer, father, brother and son. Mr. Ricky Lawson. He passed away yesterday. Please pray for his family. We will miss u." □

Monetize Your Closet



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
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I interviewed Brian Chesky, the co-founder of Airbnb, in July about the "sharing economy." While I was researching Chesky's company, I got a call from an entrepreneur, Tracy DiNunzio. She had heard that I was writing about Chesky and wanted to tell me about her startup because it was related to Airbnb, the site on which anyone can rent a spare bedroom to anyone else around the world and pick up a little cash. In DiNunzio's case, four years ago she was raising capital for her startup, Tradesy.com.

"I started Tradesy with about \$12,000, from a combination of credit card debt and loans, and went on to generate an additional \$28,000 to fund the company over our first 18 months of operations by renting out my spare room on Airbnb," she explained. "I used free Internet resources to teach myself Web design, marketing and basic coding, and had everything I needed to start a business that now employs 22 people and serves 1.5 million customers every month."

DiNunzio is one in a wave of entrepreneurs who've been buoying our economy from below, at a time when so much national economic policy has been paralyzed. These risk-takers never got the word that China will eat our lunch or Germany will eat our breakfast, so they just go out and start stuff, and build stuff, and invent stuff - and create 20 jobs here and 30 jobs there. Specifically, DiNunzio is part of a budding new economic activity called the "sharing economy" or "collaborative economy," which offers a new avenue for the middle class to create wealth and savings. These entrepreneurs are not the only answer for our economic woes - they create jobs, destroy jobs and create big efficiency savings all at once - but they are surely part of the answer, and it's a shame that we don't spend more time thinking about how to multiply them.

Like all good entrepreneurs, DiNunzio, 35, got her start by paying attention. In her case, it was paying attention to her rapid-fire wedding and then divorce to start a company in 2009, called Recycled Bride, which enabled couples to, as Forbes put it, sell "their wedding finery and excess sundries so they could ride off in the sunset without staggering under the weight of debt." She expanded that into Tradesy, which enables women to monetize the used or unused clothing and accessories in their closets by creating a peer-to-peer marketplace in which pricing, listing, buying, selling, shipping and returning goods is seamlessly easy - and

with Tradesy taking a 9 percent commission. She is not alone in that space, but it's working.

"We have a section on the site for wedding attire," she explained. "We have seen three brides wear the same dress." The first bought a Vera Wang wedding dress for \$8,000 and then sold it on Tradesy for \$3,000. The second wore it and resold it for \$3,000. "So the bride in the middle of that trade wore her \$8,000 Vera Wang wedding dress for free."

"A sharing economy platform can aggregate massive amounts of inventory more quickly and cheaply than retailers because our supply is crowd-sourced from users," DiNunzio said via email. "Having an abundance of product and content available allows our site to achieve larger and faster distribution across Web channels such as search and social media, accessing masses of customers quickly and cheaply. Tradesy has accumulated \$97.5 million in inventory, at virtually no cost to our business, in 13 months. If we had to do that with product that we produced or purchased, it would certainly take more time and resources, and expose us to significant inventory risk."

The sharing economy is producing both new entrepreneurs and a new concept of ownership.

"With improved peer-to-peer commerce platforms that remove the friction and risk from multiparty transactions, consumers are being empowered to value and sell their space, their belongings and their time in ways that weren't previously possible," DiNunzio said. "For those at the cutting edge of this trend, durable goods are viewed as temporal objects to enjoy and pass on rather than 'belongings.' Personally, I no longer feel like I 'own' anything. I enjoy my consumer goods for a day, a week or a year, take good care of them because I assume they'll go on to have another life with someone else, then share or sell whatever I'm tired of. I get access to goods and services that would typically be beyond my means, without accumulating a ton of stuff."

This "lightweight living," she added, "goes hand in hand with a reimagined concept of ownership that's focused on utility rather than possession, and can ultimately result in consumers enjoying more variety for their dollar." Aren't retailers hurt? "Tradesy's early data suggests that our customers actually spend more at retail when they feel confident that there's a viable resale opportunity on the secondary market." The "fashion middle class" is disappearing, added DiNunzio. "We have a whole swath of middle-class consumers who are tired of buying disposable fashion but don't have the means to buy the luxury brands." Through sites like Tradesy, she argued, "women can have their cake and eat it, too, by collaborating to consume the fashion they want."

Welcome to the collaborative economy. Spring cleaning has never been more profitable. □



Civic Break For The Holidays



GAIL COLLINS
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So, how do you like living in a country that has a budget? Last week, the Senate finished work on legislation that will forestall any government shutdowns for the next two years. Then our lawmakers packed up and went home for the holidays. They kept everything else open and closed down Congress! Finally, America's getting what it really wants for Christmas.

It's great, right? And people have noticed. Even as a new federal budget was wending its way from House to Senate last week, a Washington Post-ABC News poll showed that American approval of the job Congress was doing had rocketed from 12 percent to 16 percent.

"The budget agreement is not perfect," said the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, before the bill finally passed. This was a major refrain during several days of long, meandering debates. Other favorite themes: bipartisanship, the evils of Obamacare, the goodness of Pope Francis and the Republicans' strong feelings about unfairness of Senate rules. "Like the frog in the warming water, we do not realize we are being cooked and that the freedoms of Americans are being cooked!" cried Sen. Jeff Sessions

of Alabama. That was a reference to the rules, although honestly, it could have been about pretty much anything except the pope.

We are not going to discuss whether or not he had a point. I believe I speak for the entire nation when I say that there will be no thinking about the Senate rules during Christmas vacation. The debate - perhaps you didn't catch it - also included a passionate attack on one section of the budget that reduces automatic cost-of-living increases to pensions of military retirees who aren't actually retired.

Let me run over that again. Suppose you joined the Army at 25. You can retire at 45 on a good pension, which is regularly increased through cost-of-living adjustments. Under the new budget law, those increases would be 1 percent lower until you hit 62.

"How far have we fallen? Do we have no shame?" cried Sen. Lindsey Graham.

A number of observers noted that Graham is a huge fan of reducing cost-of-living adjustments for Social Security recipients. Also, of raising the retirement age for Social Security to 70. But remembering our holiday season, we will accept him at his word that he was simply offended by the sudden and arbitrary nature of the military cut and not posturing for the veteran-heavy Republican voter base in the state where he is facing a primary next year.

The change in benefits for the military unretired won't kick in until 2015, and senators from both parties are already standing in line with proposals to eliminate it. Shouldn't we focus instead on protecting Americans who are actually past working age? And what about the many, many enlisted men and women who serve in combat, then leave the service after 10 or 12 or even 19 years? You'd think they could at least qualify for a 401(k).

Mark this down as something to work on in the new year.

Right now, we can celebrate the fact that we do not have a single fiscal cliff to fall over until February at the earliest. That would be the debt-ceiling crisis, when we get to wait and see whether the House Republicans will refuse to pay the nation's creditors until somebody repeals Obamacare. "We don't want nothing out of this debt limit," Paul Ryan said ominously.

Oh, Paul Ryan, we were just warming up to you and now this. But that's all next year. Everybody's clearing out of Washington now. President Barack Obama - who is looking really tired - left for Hawaii after a press conference in which he was asked if this was the worst year of his presidency.

Obama said he did not think about it that way. Personally, I kind of wished he'd said: "Yes, and I swear it will get better from here on out."

Someone else asked about the woes of the Obamacare rollout. "Since I'm in charge, obviously we screwed it up," said the president. Notice the shift in pronouns in this sentence.

Anyhow, let's hope he has a restful couple of weeks. You, too. Feel free to forget about politics for a little bit.

Hillary Clinton said recently that she's going to decide about running for president in 2014. The takeaway is that if Hillary's not thinking about this stuff right now, you have total leave to go off the grid. Visit your aunt. Go see a movie.

Maybe not the new "Hobbit" one - Thorin Oakenshield, the crown prince of the dwarves, looks a lot like Sen. Ted Cruz.

Wherever you go and whatever you do, remember to stand tall knowing that you're the citizen of a country that is capable of continuing to run for the next 24 months. Doesn't get any better than that. □

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